



WHEN Pornography Hits Home—

WIVES AND
HUSBANDS

Both Need to Heal

I have seen firsthand that the Savior's power to heal can come to wives as well as husbands when the husbands struggle with pornography.



Name withheld

Within my first six months as bishop, I had several couples in my ward come to me in confidence to tell me of the husband's struggle with pornography use. In some cases, the wife was reeling from the shock of having just learned the devastating secret; others had been aware for months or years.

I have felt compassion for each of these couples and have felt the Savior's redeeming power as I have counseled

regularly and carefully with each of the brothers to help them "shake off the chains . . . that would bind [them] fast" (2 Nephi 9:45).

Perhaps the greatest outpourings of the Spirit have come, however, as I have met with their wives. I have found that, while some of the wounds are fresh and others are scarred over from years of exposure, all of these sisters cope with a deep spiritual hurt caused by questions such as, "What have I done to cause him to not be attracted to me?" or "Why does he want to imagine himself with someone else rather than with me?"

Because it is the husband who has transgressed, it is easy for the bishop to feel that the husband most needs access to the keys to unlock the Savior's healing power, but I have learned that the wife's need to be healed of pain and trauma is as great as the husband's need to be healed of sin and obsessive urges.

In his discourse to the Nephites, the prophet Jacob condemned the men for their unfaithful conduct toward their wives, "many of whose feelings [were] exceedingly tender and chaste and delicate before God, which thing is pleasing unto God" (Jacob 2:7). He continued: "Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives . . . because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you" (Jacob 2:35). I have witnessed these sobbings firsthand. They often spring not just from the wife's deep sense of betrayal caused by her husband's pornography use but also from the demeaning words and surly behavior that frequently surface as a result of his inner struggle. It is not uncommon, in fact, for a man whose habit has come to light to cast blame on his wife for his behavior, citing various actions that she has done or failed to do. Tragically, it is also not uncommon for the wife to begin to internalize and even believe these accusations.

One such couple sat in my office just days after the husband's disclosure of a pornography habit that had plagued him since his youth. While listening to a Relief

Society lesson based on Sister Linda S. Reeves's April 2014 general conference address, "Protection from Pornography—a Christ-Focused Home," the wife began to recognize in her husband's critical behavior toward her many of the tendencies the instructor was describing. Following the lesson, she confronted her husband with the question, and he confessed the secret that he had been concealing for so long. Her already-battered self-esteem was now compounded with a burning resentment. During their first meeting with me, they struggled to see how their marriage could continue. I assured them that there was hope, gave some initial counsel, and then invited them to come back and meet with me individually.

Along with the fervent prayers that I offered in preparation for those meetings, I also reviewed the suggestions



HOW PRIESTHOOD LEADERS CAN HELP

As leaders work with the spouses of members who are struggling with pornography, their efforts to ensure that these spouses feel heard and understood may be just as important as any counsel they can offer. Consider the following suggestions from Ministering Resources (ministering.lds.org):

- Meet together regularly and provide support.
- Emphasize the Savior's ability to provide personal healing for the spouse of the pornography user (see Alma 7:11 and Matthew 11:28–30).
- When appropriate, invite the individual to consider attending a support group meeting through the addiction recovery program or a similar support group.
- Help the spouse understand that he or she can receive

his or her own inspiration to know how to set clear boundaries in the relationship and in the home.

- Help the spouse find a trusted friend or family member who can provide meaningful support on an ongoing basis.
- Help the individual using pornography be accountable for his or her actions and support his or her spouse.
- Review the resources for spouses and family members on overcomingpornography.org and addictionrecovery.lds.org (particularly the "Spouse and Family Support Guide").
- Consider referring the spouse of the pornography user to professional help or counseling. Identify local resources that provide services in harmony with gospel principles.



Below: Kerri was devastated when she learned of her husband's challenge with pornography, but she found hope and healing through Jesus Christ and His Atonement. Watch her story at overcomingpornography.org.

provided in Ministering Resources on LDS.org, particularly in the resource for supporting the spouses of pornography users, where I read the following:

“Express your love and concern for her individually, as well as for her spouse. Clarify that she is not responsible for her spouse’s pornography use or poor behavior and is not expected to endure abusive behavior.”

As I met with this sister, I heeded this counsel and added to it the assurance that her husband’s actions were not about her at all, not about something that she had or had not done, but were instead about his own internal conflict. I watched a wave of relief and consolation come over her as she grasped these words and felt the Spirit’s confirmation that they were indeed true. At the end of the interview, she asked if I would give her a priesthood blessing. I realized that I was the only one to whom she could turn for such a blessing, as she preferred to keep her situation private from family and friends.

To help with the healing process, I invited the husband to attend a local Latter-day Saint addiction-recovery group, and I encouraged his wife to attend the corresponding group for spouses and family members. She told me of the comfort she felt from meeting with other sisters who understood what she was suffering and the hope that it gave her to see couples who had waded through the same trial and

had managed to emerge from it together.

Several months have now passed since my first meeting with this couple, and my love and concern for them have grown as a result of our numerous interactions. While I recognize that their continuing path will not be without setbacks, it is a joy for me to learn of each additional month that the husband has kept himself free from lust and pornography and to see his wife’s increase in self-worth and confidence, which is readily apparent.

In recent interviews with them, the anguish and tears from our early meetings have been replaced with frequent smiles and even laughter. But perhaps the greatest outcome has been hope—hope that not only can their marriage continue but also that it even has the potential to become something beautiful and exalting.

I recognize that, unfortunately, not every couple experiences this same outcome. Some marriages may fail when the pornography user refuses to make progress. Regardless of the path the husband chooses to take, however, I have learned that the counsel to minister to the wives is inspired. I hope that no sister in this situation will ever feel that she is being overlooked, misjudged, or misunderstood by her bishop. The bishop’s ministrations are a key channel through which the Savior manifests His power to fully heal each heart—even those that have been “pierced with deep wounds” (Jacob 2:35). ■



COUNSEL AND COMFORT FOR SPOUSES

“We as leaders are also greatly concerned about the spouses and families of those suffering from pornography addiction. Elder Richard G. Scott has pleaded: ‘If you are free of serious sin yourself, don’t suffer needlessly the consequences of another’s sins. . . . You can feel compassion. . . . Yet you should not take upon yourself a feeling of responsibility for those acts.’ Know that you are not alone. There is help. Addiction recovery meetings for spouses are available, including phone-in meetings, which allow spouses to call in to a meeting and participate from their own homes.”

Linda S. Reeves, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, “Protection from Pornography—a Christ-Focused Home,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 16.