

Getting Free

My journey to freedom from a thirty-year addiction to
pornography

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Prologue

This book is dedicated to every person who is addicted to pornography or other sex addictions and wants to get free. I have written this book under a pseudonym.

*Change is our companion,
Humility our helpful guide,
Resolving ourselves to persevere,
Inspired to sail against the tide,*

*Saying goodbye to old excuses,
Taking courage and hope in hand,
Offering ourselves to our Higher Power,
Putting up our sails to catch the wind,*

*Humbly living every day,
Eager to chart a course for home,
Rejecting the idols of yesterday,
Wanting freedom to be our own,*

*Ending our indecision,
Loving the truth more than the lie,
Leaving abodes best left forsaken,
So we can walk with freedom's stride.*

- T.S. Christensen

Chapter 1 – An Epidemic of Addiction

We are facing a problem of epidemic proportions in the United States, as well as in other nations around the world. The epidemic is sexual in nature, and it is like a cancer that is rapidly eating away at the core of our society, creating destruction in the lives touched by it at alarming levels. It is hard to quantify the true devastation caused by this epidemic of sexual addiction, but I will seek to provide a few examples.

Ted Bundy, convicted serial murderer of women and girls, has admitted that pornography played a significant role in his evolution into a murderer (Bundy & Dobson, 1989). Hardly a day goes by without another news story about someone convicted of sexual abuse or misconduct. Human trafficking for the purposes of the illegal sex trade occurs at an alarming rate in the U.S. The Polaris Project reports that 73% of human trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2016 concerned people being enslaved against their will for the purposes of the sex trade (Polaris Project, n.d.). The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases has reached unprecedented levels in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). I could go on and on, the devastation caused by this sex-fueled epidemic is extensive.

Pornography is one of the major factors fueling this epidemic, and in order to effectively address this problem before it destroys any more lives, we need to face pornography addiction head-on. Estimates show that pornography accounts for 30 – 35% of all internet downloads (Who Is Hosting This, 2013; Enough is Enough, n.d.). While the majority of pornography consumers are men, a significant number of women are now regular users of pornography. The organization Enough is Enough reports that, "An estimated 87% of college-age men – and around 30% of women – doubleclick [sic] for sex either weekly or every day." (Enough is Enough, n.d.).

It is important to understand that any true addiction is progressive in nature. It doesn't matter if your addiction is to alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, pornography, or any of a myriad of other possible addictive substances and behaviors – unless it is addressed, any true addiction gets progressively worse by nature. What I mean by this

is that for the addict, what starts out as being merely sexual arousal by looking at lewd images, doesn't stay there. After a while, more stimulation is required to get the same high. More images, then video, then more degrading sexual images and video. Eventually, the images alone are not enough, the desire to act out physically what one has fantasized about and viewed hundreds or thousands of times becomes stronger and stronger. You become desensitized to the fact that you are hurting others and yourself in the process, either physically, psychologically, or spiritually. The other people involved cease to be human beings with intrinsic value. In the final stages of sexual addiction, the other people involved become merely the means to an end, tools to be used to satisfy whatever sexual desire you have at the moment, to be discarded when you are through in favor of the next exotic experience. For the porn addict, it is a one-way train to destruction that goes from bad to worse if left to its natural course.

Now, to be fair, not everyone who uses pornography becomes an addict. I would argue, however, that at whatever level a person uses pornography, it produces destruction, even if it doesn't eventually lead to divorce, or sexual abuse, or other criminal sexual behavior. I would argue that any use of pornography leads the user to objectify the other human being that is the focus of their lustful desire. It is not about beauty or love – it is about slaking the never-ending thirst for a higher high. True love requires commitment, and in the world of pornography, there is no such thing. After all, the image isn't even a real person, and if the addiction progresses to the physical realm, the other person is similarly viewed as an object, a thing, not a real person – and is treated accordingly.

We have a huge problem with the objectification of women in this country due to this very process. What society produces thong underwear in children's sizes with the words "eye candy" and "wink wink," printed on the front as Abercrombie and Fitch did in 2002 (CNN, 2002)? Has not that society already objectified females as merely tools for providing pleasure? I hope that appalls you, as it does me. However, the sad truth is that many of the men (and some of the women) reading this right now are caught in a cycle of addiction to pornography and are helping to perpetuate the very same value

system they, in their mind, don't want their own children to experience. Such is the duplicitous nature of addiction. Before beginning recovery, I was pretending to be one thing in the day with my friends, family, and co-workers, and another at night when I was using pornography. It is a deadly trap. The good news is that you can break free, with the help of God and others, if you want to.

This book is not a clinical treatise on addiction. As such, I will not attempt to provide conclusive clinical or scientific proof for every statement I make in this book. The purpose of this book is to share my story and some lessons I have learned (along with observations I have made) over the course of my journey to freedom in hopes that it will help others. As such, I will give free reign to my perceptions, observations, and interpretations of my experiences, as well as the experiences of others with whom I am familiar – take from it what you will. I will be sharing what I believe are truths that have helped me, and others, overcome this addiction.

From the age of seven to the age of approximately thirty-seven, I was addicted to pornography. By the age of thirty-seven, I was experiencing such emotional, psychological, and spiritual pain as a result of the addiction that I frequently wanted to kill myself. Through a series of events, I began seeking help in getting free from that addiction. It has not been an easy journey, but I can say that now, at the age of forty-six, I have been walking in freedom from the addiction for years – freedom that I once thought was impossible. You, too, can experience this same freedom if you want it – of that I am convinced.

In the first part of this book, I will share the story of my personal journey into pornography addiction and my subsequent journey to freedom from the same. The second part of the book will cover some insights I have gained and lessons I have learned on this journey to freedom. It is my hope that this book will help many of you on your own journey to freedom from addiction – whether you are addicted to pornography or something else entirely.

Chapter 2 – Descent into Madness

Without a doubt in my mind, I believe that being molested by my grandfather was the catalyst that began my journey towards an addiction to pornography. No child is mentally, psychologically, or emotionally prepared to handle such an assault, and the results can be far-reaching and devastating – they certainly were in my case. As I write these words, I am still uncovering ways in which that experience warped my development.

When I was molested at the age of seven, I had no understanding of my sexuality, nor did I even have the vocabulary to describe what I was experiencing. One of the ways in which being molested negatively affected me was that it aroused sexual feelings in me before the age at which I would normally begin to experience such feelings. At seven years old, I had no understanding of how to process the experience. Once my parents discovered the molestation, it ended, but the damage had been done.

Around the same time as the molestation occurred, someone gave me some body-building magazines. I became instantly aroused by the pictures of the scantily clad female body-builders. I remember becoming obsessed with trying to picture them without any clothes on at all. Being raised in a Christian home, I felt guilty about these desires, but I could not deny feeling a very powerful desire that I had never felt before, desires sent into hyperdrive by the experience of being molested.

I don't recall whether I got rid of the magazines on my own, or if my parents decided that they needed to go, but soon the body-building magazines were out of my life, and my access to such materials was back to zero. For many years I had no access to anything remotely resembling pornography. Then, at the age of eleven, while playing in a wooded lot in our subdivision, I discovered a box of Playboy magazines that someone had dumped in the woods. What had, for about four years, been a latent and mostly unfulfilled desire for pornographic material suddenly roared back to life.

I became obsessed with the contents of those magazines and hid them in my room. I kept the magazines for a week or two, as I recall, before my guilty feelings

drove me to the point of burning them one day in the back yard. My religious upbringing taught that it was sinful to look at pornography, and I wanted to do the right thing, but even then I knew I couldn't simply throw them in the trash or I would go right back to them - I had to destroy them completely.

Once again, I entered a period without much access to anything pornographic. However, I soon entered puberty. Being surrounded by girls at school who were also entering puberty, my thoughts were frequently lustful. I frequently engaged in a fantasy life in my mind involving sexual situations with whichever girl or girls I happened to be attracted to at the time. Still, access to pornographic materials was all but out of my reach entirely as my parents were very strict about what movies and TV shows I could watch, as well as what books or other materials I could have.

In my teens, I began working in the summer and purchased a VCR for my room with some of the money I made. I began to amass a movie collection. As per my parents, there were restrictions placed upon what movies I could purchase, so pornography remained largely out of my reach for the time being. That would soon change.

These events occurred in the 1980's, in the days before the internet, as we now know it, existed. There was no online pornography or easy access to pornographic materials from a cell phone. However, as I grew older and bought a car, I was able to go to the stores that sold pornography and began buying pornographic magazines and renting pornographic movies. I felt incredibly guilty about my behavior, but I kept it secret and told no one. My attempts to stop were short-lived and unsuccessful.

In these early days of my addiction, I was still flying under the radar so-to-speak. I told no one about the full extent of my pornographic consumption. I sometimes confessed to having lustful thoughts or having looked at pornography to a minister or asked for prayer concerning such behavior in a men's church group, but my attempts to get help in dealing with my addiction went no further than that. In truth, I was still unaware I had an addiction and had never thought of my behavior in such a context. I

thought that I simply had a sin problem and that I could beat it in time – just me and God – with will-power, Bible study, spiritual discipline, and prayer. I was wrong.

During my college years, my pornography use remained at about the same level. I would use pornography for a while, then stop for a while, then go back. Right before I graduated college, I started seeing my future wife, and I decided to tell her about the pornography issue. I erroneously believed that I would be able to kick the habit once I was married. After all, I surmised, with a wife to share my sexual passion with, it would be easy, right? Wrong.

I stopped buying pornography once I got married, but the lust for viewing pornographic material and fantasizing about sex remained. When my wife and I would watch a movie with a semi-pornographic scene, I would deceitfully fast-forward through it or turn my eyes away, only later to watch the scene repeatedly after my wife had gone to bed. I felt guilty, but I continued my solo I-can-beat-this-myself-and-I-don't-need-to-tell-anyone-else dance with pornography, lust, and sexual fantasy.

For the next several years, that was where I stayed. I was a casual, under-the-radar user of pornography who regularly engaged in sexual fantasies and lusted after other women. I would resist these behaviors, then yield to the temptation to act out, then feel remorseful about what I had done and try to resist again. I didn't realize at the time how harmful this was to the relationship with my wife and family, but I made excuses for it and convinced myself that I was genuinely trying to quit. Then something happened that sent my addiction to new depths.

I don't remember exactly when I began accessing online pornography, but when I did, I entered a whole new level of addiction. The ease of accessing free pornography online in large quantity was too tempting to pass up – or so I thought at the time. In the early years, the internet connections were slow, so there was little online video content (at least as far as I was aware), and my internet connection was too slow to make much use of what videos did exist. But that, too, was about to change.

My wife and I had been having marital problems for years at that point. After eleven years of marriage, things were at their worst point to date. The year was 2006. I

had begun drinking alcohol regularly, which was turning into an addiction of its own. By that point, the rapidly advancing technology had driven down the price of high-speed internet, while at the same time increased the data transmission speed. It was the perfect storm for my addiction. I began viewing pornographic images and videos online on a regular basis over a high-speed connection. Our marital problems grew steadily worse. Within six months I separated from my wife and filed for divorce. While my addiction to pornography was not the only reason for our marital problems, it was a significant contributing factor.

After I had separated from my wife, it was as if the floodgates of my addiction to pornography burst open. I began spending hours a day after work viewing hard-core online pornography videos, sometimes ending my binge by drinking until I passed out on the floor. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was out of control. The reality was that I had never been in control at all – the addiction was in control of me. I realized then that I really couldn't stop using pornography on my own, and it frightened me. But my life was in such a mess at that time that I was in no frame of mind to do what I needed to do to begin the healing process.

Through a series of truly miraculous events, after almost six months of separation, my wife and I decided to try one last time to work through our issues and get back together. We started seeing a husband and wife counseling team. In one of our first meetings together, we discussed my use of pornography. I thank God that in no uncertain terms the male counselor confronted me with the fact that I had a sexual addiction and told me that I needed to get help in order for the marriage to work. He directed me to a local sexual addiction recovery program based on the Life Recovery materials.

I was desperate to change. I was frustrated with my inability to quit using pornography. Tormented by constant temptation and repeated failure to stop using pornography, engaging in sexual fantasy, and lusting, I frequently wanted to kill myself. It wasn't fulfilling, it was no longer fun, it was a drug that I was addicted to, and it was killing me. I was tired of being controlled by an addiction to pornography,

sexual fantasy, and lust. It was consuming me and was threatening to destroy my marriage and my family. I wanted to get free.

Chapter 3 – Beginning Recovery

While I had stopped looking at pornography online when my wife and I moved back in together, I was white-knuckling it, and the real problem was as bad as ever. White-knuckling is a term used in recovery circles to describe someone who is resisting the temptation to physically act out with their addictive substance or behavior of choice, but who isn't resolving the core issues that are driving their addictive behavior. White-knuckling doesn't work for long. I knew that I had to stop using pornography if our marriage was going to make it, but I also knew it was only a matter of time before I would give in again. The fantasy life, lustful thoughts, and constant tormenting temptation continued to plague me.

When I contacted the leader of the Life Recovery group, I was ready and willing to do anything the group leader told me to do so that I could get free from my addiction to pornography. If he had told me to eat grass, I would have done it. As it turns out, that was exactly the state of mind I needed to have.

Joining that recovery group was to be my first step on my journey of recovery. It began the moment I stopped trying to beat the addiction myself or deny the seriousness of the situation, and instead chose to admit my need and reach out for help. I was not simply going to a group because I hoped to avoid ending my marriage – although that was an important part of my motivation. I was really and truly embracing the opportunity to let those who had the necessary experience help me get free from my addiction.

As a pornography addict, I lived a life controlled by shame. Shame is the result of a warped and erroneous perspective on your value and worth as an individual. Shame is a belief that, due to your failures or lack of accomplishment, you are not valuable as an individual or worthy of love. None of us lives up to our ideal of what a 'good' person should be all of the time. We are human. We make mistakes. When you determine in your mind that your 'good' qualities and accomplishments are outweighed by your 'bad' qualities and your failures, you will feel shame or low self-

worth. We all need and desire to be loved and valued. When we don't, we will often take extreme and unhealthy actions to obtain the love and value we so desperately crave. Addiction is often the result.

Because of the way my psyche developed as I grew up, I learned to be a people-pleaser – to show people a version of me that I thought they wanted to see so that they would be pleased with me. As a result, I had a tendency to hide my faults and true feelings. I was not allowing anyone to see the real me, unvarnished and imperfect as I was. I was constantly plagued by the idea that if I let anyone see the 'real' me, they would reject me because I was not perfect or did not meet their standards. It is important to understand that this was a subconscious process. I was not even aware I was doing it at the time. I only discovered it as I pursued recovery from addiction.

This pattern of behavior and the accompanying mindset that supported it created a problem. I wanted the 'real' me to be loved and valued, not the 'fake' me I was showing to others in order to gain their approval. My subconscious desire for the 'real' me to be valued and loved drove me to the world of pornography and sexual fantasy. In the fantasy world I created, the 'real' me was always valued, cherished, and loved – no matter how perverted my sexual desires were and no matter what my personal failures or shortcomings were. In my warped understanding of human value and worth, I had created a counterfeit version of unconditional love. But it wasn't real, and there was a price to be paid.

Because I had repeatedly violated my beliefs and conscience about what was right by using pornography, I often felt shame concerning my behavior. The very thing I was doing in order to address the shame I felt about my shortcomings and failures didn't solve the shame problem. Instead, it produced even more shame. Pornography addiction was the temporary anesthesia that enabled me to avoid dealing with my very real fear of rejection and feelings of shame. The paradox was that while I used pornography to temporarily escape the feelings of shame, in the aftermath of my actions I actually felt more shame as a result.

This process is what we, in recovery, call the shame cycle. I would act out by using pornography and sexual fantasy to create temporary feelings of acceptance and escape from feelings of shame, low self-worth, or difficult life circumstances. The result of acting out caused me to feel more shame after the fact, so I would eventually reach out to the addiction again. This cycle perpetuates the addiction. I lived this way for decades, and it almost destroyed me.

The group I was attempting to join was a closed group, meaning it was only after going through an interview process and being approved that I would be allowed to join. I was required to write down a complete sexual history that included everything I have written about in the previous chapters of this book, and then some. It was a process that pushed my shame button big-time, but by the grace of God, I did it. I had come to realize that if I did not find a way to get free from the addiction, I was going to die. Either the addiction had to go, or I had to go, there was no other alternative.

Although I did not know it at the time, I was already beginning to work the first of the twelve steps. Step number one states, "*We admitted we were powerless over our addiction – that our lives had become unmanageable.*" I was definitely at the point where I believed that. After the group leader reviewed my sexual history report and conducted an interview with me, I was approved to join the group. I had no idea what to expect, but I was so desperate to get free I was just glad to have the opportunity to attend in the hope that it might help.

As I began attending the men's addiction group, an amazing thing began to happen. To this day I believe it was (and is) one of the most significant and powerful experiences that I have ever experienced in my life. This experience helped to propel me towards freedom from my addiction to pornography and continues to help me move forward in my recovery. For the first time in my life, I sat in the midst of a group of men and began to reveal who I really was – pornography addiction and all. These men didn't reject me, call me a pervert, or otherwise disparage me for what I had been doing or the mistakes I had made. They showed me compassion, and they accepted me

for who I was. In short, they loved me, despite knowing my faults and failures. That experience of unconditional love changed me and continues to change me.

I had been raised in a home by two parents who loved me and told me so often. They were good parents. But due to a variety of reasons, I learned to hide my true feelings, beliefs, and desires when I deemed it prudent in order to garner praise, reward, respect, and love from significant others (i.e. parents, sibling, friends, teachers, society, *et cetera*). Again, delving into how and why this occurs is beyond the scope of this book, suffice it to say that this is a very common occurrence in the childhood of many addicts. Learning to hide who I really was as a child may have been a necessary coping mechanism in my early childhood. However, as an adult, this approach to living became quite harmful.

Without knowing I was doing it, by the time I became an adult I was in the difficult and dangerous place where no one knew the real me. There was always some portion of who I was that I was hiding, depending upon the audience I was playing to at the time. I became a well-practiced chameleon, able to switch personas depending on what environment I was in at the time. Everything I allowed anyone to see was designed to produce the desired outcome. I had become a master manipulator. I wasn't even conscious I was doing this most of the time. To say there weren't times when I did it knowingly would be a lie, but I had been doing it so long, and it was so automatic, most of the time I didn't even have to think about it. No one knew the real me, and that fact made me a ticking time-bomb and drove me to pornography as a temporary escape. In my fantasy world of pornography, I could be exactly who I was and be adored and valued without exception.

In that men's recovery group, for the first time in my life, I finally made the decision to be real. It didn't happen all at once, but I began to learn to take off the mask and be increasingly honest. The more I did, the more I began to heal and to receive love from those men, and the more I began to be able to receive the love of God and to love myself. The experience of unconditional love, in turn, began to weaken the stronghold of pornography addiction in my life and made it possible for me to begin to let go of my

drug of choice. I had known in my heart that part of me didn't *want* pornography, but I also knew that a part of me still had a strong *felt need and desire* for pornography. But as the love and acceptance I found in this men's group began to change me, I realized I didn't *need* pornography anymore. I had found a place in life where I was loved and accepted - addiction problems and all.

Chapter 4 – Continuing My Journey

When I started attending the recovery group, they were working through the SA White Book – the name given to the recovery manual developed by the Sexaholics Anonymous organization. In the book, there would often be a personal story shared by someone struggling with addiction to go along with the lesson for the week. One week, I read the story of a man who had started with an addiction to pornography much the same way I did. In the story, he progressed from soft porn to harder pornography, then eventually he committed adultery, lost his marriage, and went on to experience other negative consequences of his addiction (Sexaholics Anonymous, 1989, pp. 9-25). As I read his story, two things occurred to me. My first observation was that his addiction was progressive – meaning he went from soft porn to hardcore porn, then to breaking his marriage vows and committing adultery, et cetera. The second observation I made was that I was on the same path that this man had been on, and the next step of progression for me was adultery.

At that time I had already gone through a separation from my wife, and we were then attending marriage counseling in a sincere effort to save our marriage. We had two wonderful children and had invested over twelve years in our marriage. I was determined to do everything I could to salvage and repair the relationship with my wife. Yet, as I read that man's story in the SA white book, I knew that unless I had a significant change soon, I would end up throwing it all away by committing adultery. I don't know exactly how to describe it, but I knew that unless I continued to seek and receive the help of others in addressing my addiction, that I would be powerless to stop it on my own. I had failed too many times in the past when I had tried to kick the habit on my own, only to watch my addiction grow steadily worse. But now at least I had hope. In this group, and with these men to help me, I felt that at least I had a chance.

After this experience, I became even more serious about working my program consistently, albeit imperfectly. Then, an opportunity came to attend a sexual addiction clinic hosted by Eli Machen, who was then working with the Bethesda Clinic in

Franklin, Tennessee. It was a three-day intensive hosted near where I lived at the time. Several men from our group were attending along with a few other men I had not met before. It would be another huge step forward for me and one for which I will forever be grateful.

In this secluded environment, I began to learn about my addiction at a whole new level. I learned about the chemicals the brain produces during sex or when thinking about sex, and how the pornography addict has developed a high tolerance for these drugs. This high tolerance and the continued need for more of these drugs to get the next 'high' makes the addict's natural sex drive become something it was never intended to be. We delved into the past of our childhoods and discovered how significant life events helped guide us into a lifestyle where it was easier to choose to hide our true selves instead of being real. We learned about how this hidden life propelled us towards addiction as a means of securing the love we craved and needed for the 'real' us. I shared things that weekend that I had never shared with any other man before, and it brought healing to my soul. By the end of the weekend, I left with greater hope, more information about how to move forward in my journey, and some new and deeper friendships that would bless me for years to come.

One of the things that became apparent during my journey to this point was the fact that my addiction to pornography was, in reality, a drug addiction. I had become addicted to the powerful chemicals produced by the body that are involved in the human sexual experience, and my tolerance and felt need for those drugs had become artificially elevated due to my use of pornography. In order to get free, I would need to detox from those chemicals in the same way a heroin addict detoxed from their drug of choice.

One of the steps that were recommended in the group I was in was a temporary fast from all sexual activity. My wife and I discussed it and decided that we would take this step. We decided to take a 70 day fast from all sexual activity. To go from being a frequent user of pornography and having a sex-life with my wife, to nothing sexual for

70 days straight, was a difficult challenge. I could not have done it without the support of my wife and the men in my group. During this time, I began to detox.

Before the fast, the level of temptation that I felt to lust and look at pornography was tormenting, and I couldn't imagine how I could continue living with that level of temptation. After the fast, I noticed that I didn't feel tempted nearly as often as I did before. My brain had 'reset' to a place where the desire for sexual activity was now at a more normal level. My hope that I might one day live free from the torment of the addiction continued to grow.

I continued to attend the recovery group, enlist the help of accountability partners, and work my program. There were many ups and downs, many times I felt like giving up, but I persevered and gained more and more freedom from my addiction to pornography - one day at a time. I eventually became a certified Life Recovery group leader, led a recovery group, and mentored other men who were seeking to be free from addiction. While it hasn't always been easy, this journey of recovery has definitely been worth it. In the next part of this book, I will share some of the lessons and insights I have gained during this journey that I hope will help and inspire you to get free from your own addiction, and/or help you support and understand a loved one in your life who is currently dealing with addiction.

Chapter 5 – The Foundation of Freedom

Beginning in the next chapter of the book, I will begin detailing some of the most effective and impactful lessons I have learned on the road to freedom from my own addiction to pornography. These lessons, properly understood and implemented, can help anyone facing this challenge to succeed in gaining their own freedom. However, the full power and impact of these upcoming lessons cannot be fully realized without, at the same time, implementing a firm foundation to your recovery program. The foundation of my successful recovery and that of many fellow-addicts with long-term sobriety that I know is an active and on-going involvement in a good twelve-step recovery group.

When I began recovery, as I have previously mentioned, the group I was a part of was studying the *SA White Book* – a book firmly based on the twelve-step recovery model. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I was spiritually reborn through the twelve-step process. By learning about and walking through the twelve steps of recovery, I learned about accepting myself for who I was – a valued and loved child of a Higher Power, despite my own personal and moral failings. I began to learn to separate my poor choices and bad behavior from the unique and valued human being that I was in the eyes of my Creator, and to begin to gain freedom from the toxic and destructive power of shame. Far from causing me to deny the wrongs I had done, learning these lessons helped me accept responsibility for my behavior, begin to make amends for the damage that I helped to inflict on myself and others, and receive forgiveness from my Higher Power for those wrongs. I also learned how to receive forgiveness from other people (and my Higher Power) when it was offered to me.

For those who know nothing about twelve-step programs, a brief history lesson is in order. Bill Wilson, a veteran of World War I, had risen to a reasonably affluent lifestyle as a result of his business acumen on Wall Street, and subsequently lost it all due to alcoholism. His path, should I describe it here, would be easily recognizable to anyone who has lived the life of an addict – a rollercoaster ride on a continual

downward slope to destruction. Bill was an agnostic – a person who believed that there was some ultimate power in the universe, but who was not convinced of any particular religion’s take on who or what that power might be. After being in and out of the hospital many times he had come to financial ruin yet again, but this time, something was different. He had finally realized that alcoholism had defeated him personally and that he was powerless in its grip.

It was while Bill Wilson was in this state that an old school friend and fellow alcoholic called him on the telephone, claiming that he had finally gotten free from the addiction to alcohol. Bill agreed to meet with this friend, who came to his home and shared his own story of recovery from alcoholism. His friend’s path to recovery had a distinctly religious aspect to it that Bill didn’t like. Bill just couldn’t accept the idea of institutionalized religion. Finally, his friend suggested, “Why don’t you choose your own conception of God?” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, Chapter 1). Bill was amazed by his friend’s sobriety, having known him during their shared alcoholic binges from the past, and was convinced that he would soon die from alcoholism if he didn’t stop drinking himself, so he decided to give it a chance. Bill took the principles of recovery that his friend shared with him during that encounter and began the process of developing what would eventually become the twelve steps of alcoholics anonymous. Those twelve steps have since been generalized to become the twelve steps used by countless numbers of people seeking to be free from many and varied addictions.

There are as many twelve-step recovery programs as there are addictions under the sun –there are multiple recovery program flavors for sexual addiction alone. I am going to mention only three of these groups in this chapter – all of which I have had experience with in my own life. While in-person meetings are best, some of these groups also provide opportunities for web-based, phone based, and even email-based support and/or group meetings.

The first book I began reading when I joined a recovery group was the *SA White Book*, published by the Sexaholics Anonymous organization (<https://www.sa.org>). It was and continues to be one of the most impactful books I have read on the topic of

sexual addiction. Sexaholics Anonymous is a secular organization, for those who are looking for a program that is not strictly religious in nature, and a meeting locator can be found on their website (similar locators can be found on the websites for any of these groups). I worked through the pages of this book with a group of men who were on the same journey to freedom that I was, and it is difficult to underestimate the positive effect it had on helping me get free from the bondage of sexual addiction.

The first group I joined was a Life Recovery group (Life Recovery International - <http://www.freedomeveryday.org>). We studied many books, including the SA *White Book* and the *L.I.F.E Guide for Men* (published by Life Recovery International - available in English and Spanish). Life Recovery International is a Christian organization, and their materials reflect this. Their materials use a seven-step recovery model that incorporates the principles of all twelve steps of the twelve-step model.

The last recovery group I will mention is Celebrate Recovery (www.celebraterecovery.com). As of this writing, I am currently a member of a local CR group. Celebrate Recovery is a twelve-step group that is not pornography/sexual addiction specific. The search-engine description for this group describes it as a “Christ centered [sic] recovery program for all types of habits, hurts, and hang-ups.” CR uses the twelve steps along with their own “eight principles” that focus on the Beatitudes taught by Jesus in the Bible.

One important point to make about any recovery group that deals with sexual addictions such as pornography (and this is true for all of the groups mentioned above) is that they are gender-specific. While some groups, like Celebrate Recovery, have a co-ed group gathering at the beginning of their meetings, they will break up into gender-specific groups for the open-share / step-study portion of the meeting. Any group that purports to deal with sexual addiction issues and encourages co-ed groups for the open-share or step-study portion of their meeting should be strictly avoided due to the nature of the addiction itself.

Sitting in a group of people of the same gender who are fellow addicts on the road to recovery and openly and honestly sharing your own struggles and triumphs is

the single-most important aspect of attending one of these groups, in my opinion. One of the pillars supporting the addictive behavior is a deeply held core belief that we, as addicts, are not lovable or acceptable as we are – weaknesses and failures included. Being honest about who we are and what we have done in front of others and receiving the love and acceptance that a good recovery group provides is an essential experience in the recovery process. Make no mistake about it – we have all done things that are wrong, and those actions are not acceptable. However, in a good recovery group, you can learn to separate who you are from what you have done. You can learn to take responsibility for and reject the poor choices and bad behavior of your past while receiving the love and acceptance you need from the group for yourself. Remember, you are a valuable and unique child of your Higher Power – independent of your past harmful actions. We will delve more into this principle of recovery in a later chapter.

To close this chapter, I am re-printing a generic version of the twelve steps below. I would encourage you to read through them carefully, letting the message of each step plant itself in your psyche so that it can begin to take root and grow. It is by implementing the truths contained in these principles that you can ultimately gain freedom from the bondage of pornography addiction (and any other addiction, for that matter).

The following generic twelve steps were reprinted from <http://www.12step.org/the-12-steps>.

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Chapter 6 - You Can't Do It Alone

Because we often feel shame regarding our pornography addiction, we addicts often fall into the trap of trying to overcome the addiction on our own. We are ashamed to reach out to anyone for help, so we go it alone. I pursued this failed strategy for years, thinking that if I just tried hard enough that I could stop using pornography. But, like a man caught in quicksand, the more I struggled to get free on my own, the deeper I sank into the clutches of the addiction. Oh, there were periods of temporary success, where I avoided acting out by sheer will-power – but that never lasted. When I finally did give in to the temptation again, it was even worse than before.

The quintessential male hero in many of the movies and stories from my childhood was a strong, self-reliant rough-and-tumble guy who ultimately rose to the challenge facing him and defeated the enemy – mostly on his own. Some of the best examples of this were the characters played on the movie screen by the likes of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. They were larger than life men with a gun who would take on insurmountable odds, seemingly to face defeat early on, then rise from the ashes of that defeat to overcome the enemy and win the day.

This type of hero is one interpretation of what is often referred to in the United States as the ‘American Spirit’, the rugged individualism that we value so highly, the indomitable spirit that never gives up and ultimately wins. It is a characteristic we see played out time and time again by countless men and women who go out into the world to do battle for a paycheck, a medal, a promotion, recognition by their peers – whatever the prize they seek is, and come home victorious to their adoring families.

But while most of us have some version of this story that we have internalized, idolized even, there is one big flaw with it – the story we believe in our heads is a lie. The rugged gunslinger needs his gun, bullets, usually a good horse, and plenty of food to sustain him in his battle with the bad guys – none of which he made himself. The athlete who battles back from an injury to take the top prize in their field needed doctors, medicine, coaches – a whole team of support people, in order to achieve

victory. The working mom whose husband left her to raise their three kids on her own needs someone to watch the kids while she's at work, a business to employ her, *et cetera*. None of these classic figures – real or imaginary, wins by themselves. They all need support from other people along the way.

Overcoming an addiction to pornography is no different. If you attempt to do it alone, you won't succeed. You will need a support team to help you out, or you will be the gunslinger without the gun going up against the biggest, baddest, deadliest group of outlaws you've ever faced (*they* all have their guns, by the way). In short, if you attempt to overcome your addiction by yourself *you will fail*. Think about it. Your enemy has a whole army of people on their side seeking to defeat you. First, there is the pornography industry itself, pushing their product at you on the internet and to your email account, and in the bookstores, gas stations, *et cetera*. Then there is our over-sexualized culture that uses sex to sell everything from toothpaste to websites to a particular political candidate. Oh, did I forget to mention the entertainment industry – books and movies whose producers, directors, and writers think their work is somehow incomplete or lacking unless they include salacious sexual encounters that often have little to do with advancing the actual plot of their stories? You literally cannot get away from sexual temptation entirely unless you live under a rock in the deepest part of Alaska, and only then if you leave your cell phone behind and wipe your memory. Oh – did I forget to mention that? Even part of your own brain is allied against you, bringing up memories you have stored over the years from viewing pornography or from past sexual encounters. Yes, you are going to need your own group of allies if you are to defeat this addiction successfully.

We addicts have a very strong motivation that leads us to try and overcome our addiction to pornography on our own – it's called shame. That feeling inside your head and heart that makes you feel that you would rather die than tell your wife, your husband, your best friend, or a counselor the truth about how you can't seem to stop using pornography – that's shame. We'll delve more into what shame is and how to overcome it in an upcoming chapter, but for now, it will suffice to simply recognize the

elephant in the room and that it must be addressed in order to get free from your addiction.

Humans are stubborn creatures. It is an unfortunate truth that most of us will wait until we lose something significant because of our addiction to pornography before we finally decide to overcome our fear of exposing our problem and get the help we need to get free. I waited until my marriage was almost destroyed before I came clean and reached out to get the help I needed. My wife and I had been separated for six months. I had filed for divorce. We had decided to attend counseling as a last-ditch effort to save our marriage. It was in one such counseling session where my pornography use came up. I don't honestly recall how it came up, or whether it was me, my wife, or the counselor who brought it up. Whoever broached the topic, after hearing my story the counselor sitting across the table from me pulled no punches and told me in no uncertain terms that I had a sexual addiction problem and that I needed to get help. He gave me the contact information for a Life Recovery group and by so doing helped save not only my marriage but likely my life as well.

If you are a pornography addict who has not yet taken that significant and essential step of reaching out to others for help for your addiction, you are likely terrified right now as you read this. I know, I've been there. But let me ask you this. What price are you willing to pay to keep your addiction a secret? Are you willing to lose your marriage? Your kids? How about your job? Are you willing for your pornography addiction to progress to the point where you cross a legal boundary? Are you willing to wait until you get a disease from a prostitute? How about going to jail because you had sex with a minor? Because one thing is certain, if you are addicted to pornography and don't get the help you need, your addiction will progress, and you will pay an increasingly higher and higher price for your refusal to get the help you need to get free.

I faced this reality shortly after I had joined a sexual addiction recovery group. We were reading through the Sexaholics Anonymous White Book at the time. The passage we were reading was a personal story of a sex addict. His story sounded

familiar to me – too familiar. He detailed how his pornography use had started and increased and then how he had committed adultery and then lost his marriage and so on and so forth. I saw my own story on those pages. I had not committed physical adultery, but I had seen my own addiction to pornography progress in the same way as the man in the story up until that point. I knew that if I didn't work my program and somehow get free from the addiction, that very soon I was going to end up committing adultery and destroying my marriage. I was scared because I had become convinced by that point that I didn't have the strength to stop the progression. I became much more serious about my program and getting the help I needed from others after that meeting.

So again, I'll ask you. What are you willing to lose before you get the help you need? Perhaps a better question to ask is, what are you *not* willing to lose? Whatever it is, let that motivate you to push through whatever objections and fear you may have and get the help you need. Find one of the groups I referred to in the previous chapter, go to a counselor, pastor, or priest, and start getting the help you need. Do it this week. No excuses. Set the appointment today if you can. I'm serious. If you don't do this, then nothing else you read in this book is going to help you.

Chapter 7 - Your Beliefs Drive Your Addiction

One of the main reasons an addict continues with their life of addiction is that they are ignorant of why they are an addict in the first place. One of the first, best revelations I can give to you on your journey to recovery is to help you to realize that it is your own beliefs that drive your addiction. Once you can successfully identify these beliefs, and then successfully *change* these beliefs – your addiction is toast, done, over with. The beliefs that drive you to act out in pornography addiction are the same beliefs that drive almost all addiction. These beliefs are identified in the remainder of this chapter. The good news is that once you get to the place where you can admit you actually believe these lies, then you can begin changing these beliefs. Your freedom from pornography addiction will follow.

I first became aware of the beliefs that drive my own addiction in the Life Recovery group that I have referred to in previous chapters. The first four beliefs I will list come from Dr. Patrick Carnes (Machen, n.d. p. 24). Here they are, in my own words:

1. I am a bad, unlovable person, who is unworthy of love.
2. If you really knew who I was on the inside, you wouldn't love me.
3. I cannot trust anyone else to meet my needs, not even God. Therefore, I must meet my needs on my own.
4. (Pornography/sex/fill-in-the-blank with your drug of choice) is my greatest need.

After years in recovery myself, I eventually came to believe that there is a fifth belief that works to keep us addicted to pornography or other addictive agents:

5. I gain value and worth from my performance or what I do, and not from who I am.

These five false beliefs are what drive us to become addicted to pornography, and unless we can successfully change these beliefs, we will remain addicted to something, be it pornography or another addictive agent. The good news is that your beliefs can change. One of the more amazing abilities we humans have is the ability to change what we believe. This ability to change our beliefs has helped to bring about some of the greatest accomplishments in human history, as well as some of the darkest days in history – all depending on what those beliefs are. Without getting out of scope, let's unpack each one of these false beliefs and examine how they drive us to become addicted to – and *stay* addicted to – pornography.

I am a bad, unlovable person, who is unworthy of love:

We all need love. It is one of the deepest needs of every human being from the moment we are born. When we believe we are unworthy of love or that we are unlovable, what we are feeling is shame. Books have been written on these topics, and I don't want to get lost in the weeds on any of these points as this chapter is simply a primer, not an exhaustive treaty on these beliefs. The main point I want to drive home here is that this first false belief produces intense feelings of shame, and shame is the single-most powerful belief that drives us to addictive behavior.

If I feel that I am a bad, unlovable person, who is unworthy of love, then I will go to great lengths to get love – or the illusion of love. Saying it in terms of the word shame, it could be said this way: If I feel shame about anything, I will go to great lengths to avoid uncovering my unlovableness, my nakedness to another human being. I will do almost anything to anesthetize or numb my feelings of unworthiness or shame.

So how does this belief drive us to a pornography addiction? Sex is a basic human desire, and it is tied to the core of who we are as humans. The object of our

desire (i.e. the other person) is, by definition, *desired*. We all want to be the object of desire in this scenario. Pornography stimulates the areas of our brains that house these sexual yearnings. Our imaginations take over and together with the aid of the pornography, we can easily create a fantasy in which we are adored, desired, and longed for by the object of our own sexual desire. In effect, we have manufactured temporary and artificial feelings of love and acceptance, thus temporarily soothing our fear that we are unlovable. It is a scientific fact that sexual fantasies, often fueled by pornographic images, cause our brains to produce the same 'feel-good' chemicals that are produced in an actual physical, sexual encounter. These chemicals include epinephrine, serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and catecholamines, and cause us to feel a sense of euphoria and well-being, among other things (Machen, n.d. p. 36).

If you really knew who I was on the inside, you wouldn't love me:

Pornography addiction is an intimacy disorder. If I let you know who I really am (a.k.a. become intimate with you mentally, spiritually, and/or physically), and you reject me, then I would be crushed, and my fear that I am unworthy at my core would be validated. By acting out with imaginary partners in our sexual fantasies via pornography, we can avoid revealing who we really are to an actual human being, and thereby avoid potential rejection by that person. However our sexual fantasies play out, we are the ones ultimately in control, and we manipulate our fantasies so that we can be who we really are and be adored/loved/desired for it. No matter how depraved or abnormal those fantasies are, we are the star of the show and are valued by someone else. Even in sexual fantasies where we are being abused or are the abuser, there is a twisted perception of value associated with the role we are playing out in those fantasies, so we are being 'loved' for who we are.

We, addicts, are terrified to let actual humans know who we really are deep down because we believe the lie. By acting out with pornography with its related chemical high, we can generate false feelings of intimacy and avoid the possibility of rejection by a real person. In the end, we sacrifice the potential of true intimacy by

continuing to hide our true selves from anyone who might reject us. It is only by learning to risk rejection with safe, trustworthy people that we can ever obtain the healthy intimacy that we crave. Only when someone knows who we really are, good and bad, and still chooses to value us and show us love will we begin to heal.

This healing experience began to happen for me in my recovery group. I took a chance and, among other men who were struggling with the same issues, I began to reveal who I really was – addictions and all. Those men didn't reject me. They accepted me as a fellow traveler on the journey with them to wholeness, and it changed my life. My experiences being accepted by other members of my recovery group for who I really was have helped bring healing to me and made it possible for me to be free of the lies I formerly believed about myself and God.

I cannot trust anyone else to meet my needs, not even God:

Addicts aren't a trusting bunch. We may seem like it many times, but at our core, we don't trust anyone to meet our needs. We rely on our ability to manipulate people and circumstances to our benefit to get us through life. That's the lie we buy into – that we are controlling things through our addiction, but we aren't. By using pornography, we subconsciously perceive that we are taking control over our sexuality, our self-worth. We addicts usually don't understand that's why we feel so drawn to pornography – but that's one of the things that makes it so addictive. We crave it, and we don't know exactly why the craving is so strong, and therefore we feel powerless to control the craving or break free from the addiction.

This belief, like all of the others in the list, is reinforced by life experiences. Many of us were abused as kids, so we learn not to trust those who were supposed to protect us but failed to do so adequately. Then we encounter betrayal by our peers at school or elsewhere, and the lie that we can't trust anyone else is reinforced again. Maybe we prayed to God to save a loved one, and they died anyway – guess we can't trust God either. However it happened, the lie became the truth to us, and we use pornography as one tool, in our twisted way of thinking, to meet our needs on our own.

By using pornography, we control when, where, and how our perceived needs are met. By using porn, we can produce those feel-good chemicals we have come to crave on command – our drugs of choice. We don't realize we are playing with fire until we're hooked. We don't know that we are conditioning our bodies to crave unnatural amounts of sexual stimulation in order to satisfy our craving for the drugs we have been producing in our brains every time we use pornography. We don't realize that no living human being could ever satisfy that level of craving – and they weren't ever meant to. Having a normal, healthy sexual relationship with another human being becomes impossible as long as we are still addicted to pornography.

If we desire to break free from this false belief, we must choose to trust again. By starting to trust other safe and trustworthy people in our recovery group, or on our recovery team (which may include a counselor, trusted friend, possibly our spouse, and our Higher Power), we can begin to let go of the lie and find that we are not as alone as we thought we were.

Pornography (Sex) is my greatest need:

This false belief was the one I had the hardest time coming to terms with. I was in recovery for a long time before I could embrace the truth that I was living my life as if sex was my greatest need. Then, one day I had a hard look at the facts. The fact was that I was willing to put my marriage, my family, and my religious beliefs in jeopardy so that I could act out with pornography. By continuing to act out, I was endangering the health of my marriage, taking time away from my kids, and risking the potential loss of relationship with them in the event of a divorce (not to mention being a bad example to my kids). I was also violating my religious beliefs concerning moral purity and the sanctity of marriage.

It may help if you think about the last time you acted out with pornography. If you can get inside your head in that moment, you can hopefully admit that right then, acting out was the thing you wanted most. You weren't thinking about the consequences to your marriage, your job, your mental or spiritual health, or your

family. You wanted to act out with pornography, and nothing was more important than that. If you want to be free from your addiction, you must train yourself to desire freedom more than you want to act out, you must learn to love and value true and healthy intimacy more than the short-term instant gratification that acting out with pornography provides. Working your program in a good recovery group can help you accomplish this.

I often tell people in recovery a story to illustrate why it is so important that they 'own' these lies – that is, admit and come to terms with the fact that they really do believe these lies. The story goes like this: If I tell you there are a million dollars waiting for you somewhere in the city, and I give you the keys to my car, a full tank of gas, and the address of where the money is, what is the one thing you are going to have to do before you can get that money? Some people say get in the car, start the engine, *et cetera*, and while all this is true, there is only one thing you absolutely *must* do to get the money. You could walk to wherever it is and not use the car. You could call a cab or ride a bike. But the one thing you absolutely *must* do is determine *where you are currently at*. That is key. Without that piece of critical information, you don't know what direction to go to get to your intended destination.

You can't get where you want to go unless you know where you are at. This is very true with addiction as it relates to the lies you currently believe. Until you accept the fact that you believe these lies, there is no hope of changing your belief, and therefore no hope of getting free from your addiction. In my own recovery, once I accepted the fact that I had made pornography (i.e. sex) my god, my greatest need, then I was able to begin the process of dismantling that belief and getting free from the addiction.

I gain value and worth through my performance or what I do, and not from who I am:

Society, many religious experiences, and even our family and friends often communicate to us that we are valued because of what we can do, rather than for who we are. We are applauded when we bring home the good grades or make the winning

shot in a sports game. We're commended for keeping our rooms clean and following the house rules. We're looked upon as an excellent role model when we follow all the rules of our particular religion or the rules that the government or society put in place for us. All of these messages communicate worth and value based upon what we *do* rather than on who we *are*.

Think for a moment about the Mona Lisa – a great work of art. This work of art hangs in a gallery on a wall – and does nothing. Yet, despite this fact, people the world over will agree that it is a great and valuable work of art. Why is it valuable? Is it valuable because of anything it does? Does it cure disease? Does it cool the air in the museum? Does it develop awesome and useful computer programs? It does none of these things. It is valued simply because of what it is – a great work of art.

Like the Mona Lisa, each human being is a unique work of art, with intrinsic value that doesn't increase or decrease, regardless of what we do or don't do. Yet, we are conditioned almost from birth to value others and ourselves based upon a different set of values, a set of values based upon productivity as it is defined by whatever group or person it is from whom we are seeking value.

I mentioned before that the desire to be valued and loved often drives us to act out with pornography. A pre-disposition to determine our own value by what we can do can be a direct and powerful source of the feelings of inadequacy and unlovableness that fuels our addiction. It is only when we can accept the fact that we are created by God with immutable intrinsic value, untainted by our misdeeds or apparent lack of achievement or accomplishment, that we can release the shame that is fueling our addiction and begin the road to true freedom.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the goal of this chapter was to introduce you to the five lies we believe that fuel our addiction to pornography and keep us from getting free from that addiction. Armed with this information, we can begin to examine our thoughts and see how these beliefs are driving our decision-making process and leading us deeper into

addiction. More importantly, we can begin to replace these lies with the truth by choosing to think and behave differently. To the extent we successfully abandon these lies and embrace the truth, we will gain freedom from our addiction to pornography.

Chapter 8 - You Need Good Boundaries Out of the Gate

When I began my journey of recovery from pornography addiction, I was tormented. I had tried everything I could think of trying to stop acting out to no avail. I wanted to stop this destructive obsession, but the temptation to act out was so strong that at times I wanted to die so I could be rid of it. Fortunately for me, one of the first lessons I learned on my journey of recovery was how to set good boundaries.

By setting good boundaries, I immediately saw my level of temptation to act out with pornography plummet. In so doing, I gained some much-needed breathing room that allowed me to focus on getting healed and becoming whole instead of fighting a momentum-draining and almost unbearable level of temptation to act out. Boundaries don't cure you of your addiction, but they help remove you from the front lines of the battle with temptation so that you can begin the healing process that will eventually result in your freedom from addiction.

So what is a boundary? In the paradigm of a recovery program, a boundary is a rule of behavior that helps prevent you from acting out. Good boundaries help prevent you from reaching a level of temptation that is almost guaranteed to result in acting out (i.e. using pornography in this case) and instead helps keep you in a safe space where you can live in sobriety. Sobriety, in this case, means not acting out with pornography or participating in other damaging sexual behavior.

In my years of recovery, I have discovered that the best boundaries are those that are highly tailored to the specific addict. For instance, a friend who attended the same sexual addiction recovery group as I did was a serial adulterer. He said pornography didn't tempt him, only the real physical acting out with another person. Boundaries that kept him away from pornographic websites were next to useless for him because that wasn't his temptation. One of his most effective boundaries was staying away from the part of town where all of the clubs and bars were where he used to pick up women. I could frequent those same areas all day long with no real temptation, because a) I don't drink or smoke, and b) I would never go to a bar or club in the first place - not

my thing. We both had sexual addiction issues, but our boundaries needed to be tailored to our particular temptations in order to be effective.

I began recovery when the VHS rental stores were still around. Whenever I went to rent a video in one of those stores, it was almost a 100% guarantee that I would encounter scores of video covers with inappropriately dressed women on the front in the process of looking for a good movie. When I began to learn about healthy boundaries, one of the first ones I put in place was to commit that I would not go to the video store to browse titles. Instead, I would perform targeted searches on the internet to find the title of a movie I was interested in renting. I used keywords and filters that cut down on the inappropriate titles I would otherwise see in the store or obtained a good movie recommendation from a friend. Next, I would call the store to see if they had that movie in stock. If they did, then I would go to the store, go straight to the location of that title, pick up the movie, and leave. By putting this simple boundary, or rule of behavior, in place, I immediately cut down on a significant area of sexual temptation in my life.

Another boundary I put in place concerned internet use. I moved the computer out of the spare bedroom where I could easily view pornography without anyone seeing me, and into the family room with the screen facing the center of the room. That way, anyone coming into the room could instantly see what I was looking at. This boundary helped keep me accountable for not viewing pornographic material. Some men I have been in recovery with have found that putting their cell phones in the trunk of their car after a certain time at night has helped them cut down significantly on the temptation to act out by viewing pornography on their cell phones. Sometimes the laptop goes in the car along with the phone.

With some targeted and well thought out boundaries, it is usually a relatively easy process to come up with a few good boundaries that can significantly reduce your level of temptation and the frequency of acting out. If you are serious about wanting to get free from your addiction to pornography, then you will be serious about developing effective boundaries to help keep you away from temptation. I recommend asking

someone who is familiar with your story, such as your sponsor, to help you develop your boundaries – particularly if you are just starting out in your recovery. At the beginning of your journey, you will likely have significant blind spots preventing you from identifying some helpful boundaries that will be obvious to someone else who is a) wiser in the ways of recovery, and b) more objective about your current situation than you are.

I've been in recovery and living in freedom from pornography use for years. I have led sexual addiction recovery groups, and I have served as a sponsor for men in these groups. During this time I have helped many men develop good boundaries that have helped keep them a safe distance from overwhelming temptation. When observing these boundaries, they have reported decreased temptation and an increase in sexual sobriety. After a while, I have noticed that many of these same men would begin reporting an increase in acting out once more. When questioned, in many cases it would come down to the simple fact that they had become lax in keeping the boundaries we had developed. This leads me to state what should be an obvious truth: boundaries only work if you use them.

Recovery is not a gulag where you are stripped of your rights, thrown in a cell, and forcibly prevented from acting out with pornography. Recovery is and must be a choice. By making a series of good choices starting right now, I firmly believe that anyone reading these words can get free from their addiction. Your addiction was built into a formidable fortress one poor choice at a time. Your freedom can be gained by making one good choice at a time.

I've been in the hell-hole of addiction, tormented to the point where I thought I would never get free. Thirty years of bad choices had built a formidable addiction to pornography in my life. Now I have been free from acting out with pornography and living in sobriety for over eight years. It can be done. If you follow the advice in this book, you can have a much more successful journey than if you try and learn all of these lessons the hard way. Be smart. Don't try and reinvent the wheel. Instead, learn from those of us who have gone before you and build your own fortress of freedom

from addiction with the bricks of our hard-won successes. Boundaries – just do it.

HOMEWORK: Develop three boundaries this week that you believe will help you avoid the temptation to use pornography and share them with a friend who will help keep you accountable for implementing them.

Chapter 9 - Dismantling Shame

Shame is a prime force in perpetuating addiction. We have already discussed how shame is the single-most powerful belief that drives us to addictive behavior (see chapter 7). In this chapter, we want to take a look at some specific tactics we can use to take shame out of the equation and short-circuit the addiction cycle. Let's begin by taking a look at a typical scenario for a recovering addict:

1. You see a person, an ad, a magazine cover, *et cetera*, and have a lustful thought, indulge in an inappropriate sexual fantasy, or go on a binge with pornography.
2. You immediately regret these thoughts and actions and feel ashamed for what you have done or the thoughts that you had.
3. You think that you must be a horrible person for engaging in such activity involving pornography, or perhaps thoughts about your neighbor's wife, or a co-worker, or even worse, an under-aged girl (fill in the blank here with your own flavor of sexual temptation).
4. You feel hopeless of ever getting to the point of never having another lustful thought, using pornography, or having illicit sexual fantasies ever again. An inner voice whispers to you that you are obviously an incorrigible human being who is destined for failure, and your recovery program isn't working (more shame-inducing self-talk).
5. Unknown to you, the festering shame you now feel plants the seeds for acting out again with your addictive agent (i.e. pornography) in order to temporarily generate feelings of love/acceptance/happiness so that you can avoid the intense feelings of shame and inadequateness.

6. Wash, rinse, and repeat, beginning with step #1.

Sound familiar? Probably everyone who has ever attempted to get free from an addiction to pornography has experienced something similar to the scenario I have just described. This is often referred to as the 'shame cycle' in recovery circles. I have faced scenarios similar to this time and time again on my own journey of recovery. It wasn't until I finally began to examine and change the way that I think about the shame cycle that I began to make significant progress in stopping the thought processes that fueled my addiction for so many years.

In the scenario above we see a thought pattern emerging which I find common among addicts. The pattern is something like this: when I think/desire/do something bad, then I perceive that I *am* bad. Since feeling that you are bad or unlovable and are unworthy of being loved is the very definition of shame, you can see why this is a thought process that needs to be changed.

I have found a great deal of success in my recovery by using the following two approaches to change my own shame-based thought process. First, I began changing the way I think about the thoughts and desires that pop into my head. I began to consider where they come from, and what these thoughts and desires tell me about the state of my sobriety/recovery. Secondly, I began changing the way I think about the source of my true value and worth as an individual. The combination of these two changes has been a power aide to the recovery process in my life.

The following story will help illustrate one of the changes I made in how I think. A young Native American boy came to an elder in his tribe one day with a question. "I know the difference between right and wrong, but I often do the wrong thing. How can I stop doing the wrong things?" The elder responded with this analogy: "In your spirit are two dogs, one is good, and one is evil. These two dogs fight inside of you whenever you are faced with a decision between good and evil. The one who wins will determine which path you choose to take." The wise old elder sat back and waited for the young

boy to ponder his story. It wasn't long before the boy had another question. "But how do you tell which of the two dogs will win?" The old man replied, "Whichever one you feed."

This story has some interesting implications. The one I want to focus on is how the elder presented the nature of the internal struggle that we all have. He presented the spirit of a human being as having two distinct elements, good and evil. In my old thought process, I often judged myself as if all of my thoughts and desires were coming from the same place. I call this the 'monolithic me' viewpoint. If my thoughts and desires were evil or bad at any point and time, then my perception was that I was somehow bad, evil, or broken as a whole. After all, how could some of these horrible thoughts and desires come from within someone who was successfully on the road to recovery and changing for the better?

As my recovery progressed, I started thinking of my inner struggle more like the old man did in the story above - as having a duel nature. One-half of my nature produced these evil or destructive desires and thoughts, and the other half of my nature produced the good or beneficial desires and thoughts. By learning to view myself in this way, it became easier for me to focus on moving forward instead of getting bogged down with feelings of shame. When sexually immoral thoughts or desires came along, I no longer jumped to the conclusion that I was a bad, unlovable person who was unworthy of love. Instead, I acknowledged those thoughts and desires were coming from that evil nature within me - a nature which I was actively working to resist. I still had the good nature within me - the side of me that wanted to do what was right and resist the evil nature's impulses and desires. By viewing my thoughts and desires this way, I could focus on how to reduce or eliminate these unwanted and destructive thoughts and desires without believing I was a horrible person simply for having them in the first place.

But this change was only part of the equation. At the same time, I was learning to change the way that I thought about my value and worth. Shame is, after all, a misconception about the true source of our value and worth. Shame occurs when we

determine our value and worth from our performance. But our performance, either good or bad, is not where our true value and worth come from. Our true value and worth come from the Creator. He created each of us with unique, immutable, and intrinsic value and worth that cannot be diminished by our performance, or lack thereof. Nothing we do can change our true value and worth. Truth be told, Hitler had just as much worth and value as a human being as Mother Theresa had. Now, I know many of you just cringed, but it's the truth. The fact that your mind wants to immediately reject this claim illustrates that there is a part of our human nature that seeks to define a person's value and worth by their performance, or their actions. Understand that I am *not* saying that the effects of the actions of Hitler and Mother Theresa produced equally valuable benefits for the human race. Understanding the difference between the value of a person and the value of the results of their actions is key to this second piece of the puzzle.

It can help to understand this concept if you look at it from the perspective of a parent with two very different children. Every parent who has had more than one child can identify with what I am describing. As a parent, you love your kids. You would jump in front of a car to save their lives if necessary. But you also know that during their lifetimes, you enjoy certain children more than others at different times. You may have one child (child A) who always cleans their room, makes good grades in school, and never gets into trouble. You may have another child (child B) whose room smells like a pig sty, who is failing every subject because they don't even try, and who is constantly getting into trouble. You will certainly enjoy the process of living with child A more than living with child B at that point in their lives. However, you would still give your life to save either of them. That is to say, you value or love them both the same regardless of their performance.

As humans, we aren't perfect, and therefore the above example may produce some skepticism. As a human parent in the above scenario, you may not love both child A and child B the same - we aren't perfect after all. But the Creator Who made each of us *is* a perfect parent, and He is somehow able to pull it off. You see, God loves

each of us the same. He loves and values you, me, Hitler, and Mother Theresa the same, even as at the same time He is not equally pleased with the choices we may or may not make in the course of our lives. The more you internalize this truth, the more you will be able to detach your value and worth from your thoughts, desires, and actions, and begin to focus on making positive changes instead of getting waylaid by tormenting thoughts and attitudes about your value and worth as a human being.

By learning to think of myself as having a dual nature and believing that my true value and worth as an individual is not dependent upon my thoughts, desires, or actions, I have been able to significantly and continually reduce the presence and effects of toxic shame in my life. Fighting the negative effects of shame takes a great deal of energy. However, with shame becoming an increasingly smaller factor in my life, I have been able to focus more of my energy on reducing destructive thoughts and desires, and on finding effective strategies and disciplines to feed the good desires and thoughts. This process has led to an increase in beneficial actions and behaviors (i.e., greater freedom from addiction to pornography).

Up to this point in the chapter, I have been keeping my references to our Higher Power very generic. I chose to do this because I realize that not everyone reading this book has the same religious beliefs that I do, and I want to respect that. However, I think it would be disingenuous of me to omit the fact that an integral part of my journey to understanding these truths came directly from my religious experience as a follower of Jesus Christ. Toward that end, I would like to share the following excerpt from the Bible that encapsulates several of the points I have made in this chapter that I think you will find helpful. The Bible records the following exchange between a man named Nicodemus, and Jesus (John 3:3-6;16 NASB translation of the Bible):

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter in to the kingdom of God.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

...

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

I am not suggesting that a person can only be free from an addiction to pornography if they become a Christian. However, the passage above does describe the points I am trying to make very succinctly. In the Christian paradigm, this 'new us', or the part of us that is 'born of the Spirit', has only good desires and thoughts, and the 'old us', or that part of us that is 'born of the flesh', generates bad thoughts and desires. Until we are reunited with God in the next life, we still have the 'old us' to contend with. The old and the new continue to exist inside of us, vying for control of our lives. Our minds perceive thoughts that originate from both sides of us, the good and the bad. The course of our lives is directed by which thoughts we choose to act on.

The second observation about this passage that I would make speaks directly to our value and worth. Jesus is saying that God loves us all the same. God sent His son Jesus to help save us all from our evil or bad natures because he valued us all equally. God's love for us is not based upon our performance, but is rather based upon our status as sons and daughters of God.

Conclusion:

Shame is toxic and can sabotage our best efforts to get free from an addiction to pornography. In this chapter we have discussed two powerful techniques for getting rid of toxic shame that both involve changing the way we choose to think about a) our thoughts, desires, and actions, and b) what the source of our true value and worth as individuals is. By learning to view our inner struggles with both good and bad

thoughts and desires as part of our dual nature and not as an all-or-nothing statement on our value as a person in any given moment, we can focus on positive change rather than on an unproductive battle for self-worth. In tandem with this viewpoint, we can choose to believe the truth that our intrinsic value and worth is an immutable truth established by God rather than a fluctuating gauge that depends on our current performance. Together, these changes can sap the power from toxic shame and push us one giant step closer to freedom from addiction to pornography.

Chapter 10 – The Serenity Prayer: Getting Spiritual to Get Free

Many people the world over are familiar with the Serenity Prayer, first made popular by the Alcoholics Anonymous recovery program. The author of the prayer is widely attributed to be the theologian Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr. The version in wide use today is a shorter version of the prayer. The full text of one of the earlier versions of the Serenity Prayer is as follows. I don't recall where I first came across this full version, but it can be found on the internet

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer#cite_note-FRS-1):

God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things which should be changed,
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other,
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.

I pray this prayer often, usually in the morning, and find that it helps me get centered in a good place to begin my day. It helps me get my mind thinking correctly about the tasks that lay ahead of me and get the right perspective on the issues I am

facing.

The Power of the Serenity Prayer

I realize that for many of you reading this book who may not come from a religious background, that the idea of praying to your Higher Power might be unfamiliar at best, and at worst, downright scary or foolish-sounding. I can empathize with this perspective. However, our own best thinking is what led us down the self-destructive path of addiction, and our own best thinking was unable to deliver us from that same addiction. It should come as no surprise that, if we are to get free from addiction, we will be called upon to embrace some new ways of thinking. I would suggest that now is a good time to embrace the concept of prayer to your Higher Power. Prayer, in its simplest form, is simply the method we use to talk to our Higher Power. Hopefully, with this perspective, you can take advantage of this powerful tool for positive change in your own life.

I often use the Serenity Prayer as a kind of mini-inventory. As I repeat each line of the prayer, I will often review in my mind the things in my life that are applicable to that line. By so doing, I let go of what I need to surrender to my Higher Power and embrace the responsibility for doing what I can and should do myself. When I am done, I often have reinvigorated purpose for the day and a wonderful sense of peace that derives from the belief that my Higher Power will be handling those tasks that I cannot handle, so I don't need to worry about them any longer.

To demonstrate this process, I will copy the words of the prayer again below and insert my own sample dialog in italics, which is similar to what I often think in my mind during my prayer time.

Sample use of the Serenity Prayer:

God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,

I cannot change my friend who needs to implement more effective boundaries; I cannot

change the fact that the world can sometimes be a dangerous place, I cannot snap my fingers and stop all temptation from coming my way.

Courage to change the things which should be changed,

I can tell my friend that I am concerned about how his lack of effective boundaries seems to be damaging his program. I can lock my doors and teach my children how to be as safe as possible while still living their lives. I can implement effective boundaries to minimize the temptations I will encounter today.

And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

I thought I could make my co-worker stop that annoying thing they do, but I realize I can't, so I'm surrendering that whole situation to You.

Living one day at a time,

I don't need to worry about the next job I will need in several months because there is nothing I can do about it right now anyway.

Enjoying one moment at a time,

I can enjoy being with my wife, children, and friends today. I can enjoy a good book or movie today. I can enjoy exercising today. I don't have to be consumed with planning for tomorrow so much that I don't enjoy right now.

Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,

I can accept that my recent injury to my knee has been instrumental in teaching me patience and that it has put me in a position to strengthen my trust in God to heal me and help me live in peace until then. I can accept that facing some hard truths about my penchant to try and control others has led to a better relationship with my wife, even though changing these beliefs and behaviors has been hard.

Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,

Even God Himself didn't feel the need to remove all sin from this world when he walked among us, so it's o.k. that I live in an imperfect world. It doesn't have to be perfect for me to have a good day.

Not as I would have it,

Even if I don't get to go to that event tonight like I am planning, the world won't end, and I can still be happy.

Trusting that You will make all things right,

If I surrender to Your will,

It is not my responsibility to right every wrong or make everything turn out the way I believe it should today. I can let go of the felt need to make others behave or live the way I think they should today, even if the things they are doing are evil, wrong, or harmful. I can't make all these things right today, but You will in time.

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,

And supremely happy with You forever in the next.

I don't have to have a perfect day today. An imperfect day can still be a good day, sometimes even a great day. I know that life will only be perfect in heaven, and I can look forward to that day without forgetting to enjoy and make the most of where I am right now.

Amen.

Final Thoughts on the Serenity Prayer

One of the best things the Serenity Prayer does for me is to help me remember the fact that I am not in recovery alone. I am not the one who is responsible for making everything happen. There is a very real God Who is actively working on my behalf to

help me live free from the bondage of addiction. I lived for many years trying to do things my own way with my own power with regards to my pornography addiction, and all I achieved was to isolate myself from other people and sink further and further into the quicksand that is addiction.

In many ways, this little prayer is a map for many elements of a successful journey from addiction to recovery. For a successful program, I must accept the fact that I cannot control everything, that I must accept responsibility for my actions, learn to surrender to God's will concerning how I choose to satisfy my sexual desires and learn to live in the moment. The Serenity Prayer helps remind me of all of these truths.

Another Powerful Prayer

Another recovery prayer that I pray quite often is very short, and in my experience, very powerful. It is simply this: "God, please keep me sober". I pray this prayer in those situations where I feel ambushed by a tempting situation, be it a salacious image on an otherwise news-oriented site, or someone I encounter in public who is dressed inappropriately.

By praying this prayer, I am acknowledging that I cannot resist temptation solely on my own, that I need God's help to stay sober. It helps me to turn my focus off of the temptation, and onto my Higher Power. Lastly, it reminds me of what is more important than the temporary high that yielding to a temptation provides - living a sober life, free from the bondage and destructive power of addiction.

In Conclusion

You were never meant to face this battle alone. Remember that your Higher Power is always ready and willing to help you get free. All you need to do to engage the help of your Higher Power is ask, and prayer is how you can do that. Prayer doesn't need to be complicated, and you don't need to be a certified member of a particular religion to call out for God's help. I hope that you will reach out to your Higher Power with these two prayers (and others you may find helpful along the way)

in order to get the help you need on your journey to freedom from addiction.

Chapter 11 – Being Honest about Our Motives

Motives, for an addict, are tricky things. They hide in the corners of our minds and try to fake us out. We addicts are especially adept at keeping them hidden, the dangerous ones, and trotting out the more acceptable motivations for others to see. We often do this with straight faces and say something like, “I just wanted to see the news, and then there was this link that led me to...”, “I intended to watch only the movie trailers, but after the trailer, there was a link to...”, or “I was just wondering what it said on her t-shirt,” (which happened to be wet and three sizes too small – this part left unsaid of course).

Addicts are master manipulators. The trouble is, that if you tell a lie long enough, you begin to believe it yourself. For some of us –many of us, we started telling ourselves lies about our motivations long before we even knew what motivations were. For me, growing up in a religious home, it was wrong to lust, wrong to look at porn, wrong to have sexual fantasies. Consequently, when I found myself doing these things, I had to make an excuse for how I was really trying to do something benign, and then the temptation snuck up on me and I gave in. I couldn’t tell myself the unvarnished truth, the shame demon I kept carrying around with me was trying to make sure of that, and I listened to it for far too long.

The truth is that we human beings often do things with mixed motivations. The single girl may dress nice because she likes the way it makes her feel, but she also wants the boys to look at her when she walks by. The politician may actually want to solve the problem, but they want the votes so they can stay in office maybe a lot more. I am a people watcher and have a natural curiosity, but when I was acting out, I often found myself watching a disproportionate amount of attractive women who weren’t dressed appropriately.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again here. If you want to get somewhere, the first thing you must determine is where you are right now. If you can’t learn to be honest about your motivations regarding the behaviors that support and promote your addiction, including acting out with pornography, then you will never be free. As Jesus

once famously said, “Know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Well put, Jesus.

So where does this leave us? Well, if we act out, let’s start by assuming our subconscious motive was actually to act out a long time before we got to the point of viewing porn. I find this is the best place to start. If, you can find credible evidence to suggest otherwise, then, by all means, let the truth be made known. However, I believe you will find that in most cases where you act out with pornography, you were actually starting down the path days, if not weeks before the actual event. Identifying those motivations and understanding the choices you made in service to those motivations is key to long term sobriety.

Let me provide an example from my own journey to illustrate the point. Years ago I had an email account with a certain online provider that shall remain nameless. The spam folder for this email account would regularly have sexually explicit material in it – sometimes pictures and often links to pornography websites. I would be on one of my regular periods of pursuing sexual sobriety where I was ‘resisting’ the urge to go and visit the porn sites. During one of these phases, I would elect to go and ‘clean out’ the spam folder of my email account. After all, there were sometimes legitimate emails in the spam folder, and I didn’t want to miss an important email, did I? Inevitably I would end up clicking on one of the emails containing the illicit material, then it wasn’t long before I was off on another pornography binge.

The truth was that either days or weeks before I had already begun the thought process that was leading to the moment I clicked on that link to view pornography. The truth was that looking at the spam folder had very little to do with identifying legitimate email from a non-porn source, and much more to do with a desire to view pornography. In the list of motivations, viewing pornography was #1 at 90%, and finding legitimate emails which were accidentally sent to the spam folder was a distant #2 at around 10%. Owning that 90%, i.e. admitting what my true and strongest motivation was in that situation was the first step in getting free from a repeat performance.

We addicts have to begin dealing with the shame demon in our lives before we

have a ghost of a chance of being honest about our real motives. However, it is something we must do if we ever want to be truly free. We must pursue a lifestyle of brutal honesty with ourselves and with others we trust in our recovery program in order to be free from bondage to our addiction.

Today, I still find my flesh, that part of me that wants to act out, trying to use this old tactic of hiding my true motives. The magazines in the checkout line at Walmart or the grocery store often have inappropriate images on them. Yet, I still find myself at times hiding behind a motive of just being curious about what is going on in the world or interested in the latest celebrity divorce and minimizing or ignoring that perhaps my more prurient motivations are in play when I choose to look at those magazine covers. But, if I am to be honest, I must acknowledge that why I choose to look at those magazines is at least partially influenced by lustful desire – sometimes it is a far bigger portion of my motivation than I want to admit even now, after being in recovery for years. In all honesty, there is no good reason for me to look at those magazine covers at all. I don't think I have ever seen anything on any of them that has ever made my life better, but I certainly have seen plenty of images that I have lusted after and fantasized about. Once I am truly honest about my prurient motivations, I have a much better chance of embracing the truth and choosing to turn away from those magazines the next time I am in the check-out line, thus avoiding the temptation that I know will come if I do look that way. The bottom line here is that being honest about our motivations is a life-long pursuit for the recovering addict and one that we must constantly push ourselves to pursue if we want to get and remain free.

For many of us who are addicts, being honest is not as easy as it sounds. Many of us learned to be deceitful in our childhood as a defense mechanism in order to protect ourselves. This tactic wasn't thought out or planned – it was a natural response to a less than perfect situation in our lives where we were faced with some form of abuse, neglect, or some fearful situation that we were not capable of dealing with in a healthy way. Often those who were supposed to protect us failed to do so either through neglect, ignorance, or in many cases because they were the perpetrators of the

abuse to begin with. I get it, I've been there. But now that we are adults, it is time for us to embrace the process of change and learn to live honestly.

There were a number of experiences I had growing up that influenced me to turn to deceit as a defense mechanism that I won't get into here for brevity's sake. Many of you reading this have had far worse experiences than I had growing up that pushed you in the same direction. I understand how hard it is to put down the security blanket of dishonesty. I know the terror you feel when you even think about telling your spouse you have a pornography problem. I want to tell you that there are men and women in thousands of recovery groups around this country that have gone through the same thing. Go to one of these groups, hear their stories, then after you've been there a while, take a step of faith and begin to tell your own story. A bit here, a bit there. You don't have to jump off the deep end all at once, but you do have to start wading in the shallows of honesty if you ever want one day to swim in the ocean of freedom. What you will realize along the way is that they are the same body of water.

Your level of freedom from pornography addiction is inextricably intertwined with the level of honesty you maintain in your intimate relationships. One of the many truths you will hear in recovery groups is, "You are only as sick as your secrets." You can do this. You can pursue honesty and live to tell the tale. Those who really love you won't leave you once you start being honest about your addiction and your problems. It isn't always an easy path, but it is the only path to true freedom. Be real; be honest; be free. God bless.

Chapter 12 – How to Handle Illicit Thoughts and Desires

Learning how to deal with the thoughts and desires that arise from within myself has been a crucial component of successfully overcoming my own addiction to pornography. For many years, the shame that I felt simply for having lustful or pornographic thoughts and desires was a huge barrier to getting free. I felt like I was a despicable person for simply having these thoughts and desires to begin with. Then, once I began my recovery, I felt that the continued presence of these thoughts and desires were signs that I wasn't changing, that I was failing in my quest for freedom. I am happy to report that I was wrong on both counts.

Hear me. Really listen to the following words. You are not a despicable, worthless person because you have evil, lustful, pornographic thoughts and desires – you are simply human. Neither are you failing in your quest to be free from the addiction of pornography simply because you continue to have these thoughts and desires. We can't stop thoughts or desires from occurring, but we can change our behavior and environment, which can eventually lead to fewer destructive thoughts and desires so that they are reduced to a manageable level.

While this chapter will be helpful to someone who is just starting out in recovery, it is especially helpful for someone who has been on the road to recovery for a while and suddenly notices that their thoughts and desires seem to be going full-throttle in reverse back to unhealthy pre-recovery levels. If this is you, you may find yourself at your wit's end and fear the worst. After all, aren't you already working your recovery and doing everything you know to do to get free and stay free? It can be a very frustrating and self-defeating situation if not handled properly. If this is you, know that you are not alone. Keep reading. Help is just a few words away.

Our thoughts and desires occur due to a variety of influences. These influences stem from our inherent nature as well as our environment, combined with how we react to those influences, reaching all the way back into our childhood and extending to our present. To attempt to stop these thoughts and desires from occurring at all would require that we completely destroy a part of ourselves that is integral to who we are and

remove ourselves from any contact with the vast majority of human society. That is not possible in this lifetime, nor is it a healthy goal. However, as discussed previously in the chapters on dismantling shame and implementing healthy boundaries, we can greatly diminish the sources of these thoughts and desires, both internally and externally, and thereby greatly reduce them in power and frequency.

Like anyone who pursues recovery from an addiction, I have my ups and downs along the way. There are times when I notice a spike in lustful thoughts and desires. I have learned over the years to take these experiences at face value, and not get caught up in battling with shame over the mere fact that they are rattling around in my mind and body. Instead, I immediately begin the process of analyzing why the increase might be happening. I ask myself what factors in my behaviors, thought processes, or circumstances might be influencing the increase, and what can I do to minimize or remove those things from my life?

Sometimes identifying the reason for the increase in these types of illicit thoughts and desires can be obvious. If I have gone to the beach this past weekend and seen about a hundred scantily clad women prancing around, then I have a pretty good idea why I'm suddenly seeing a spike in lustful thoughts and desires on Monday morning. The remedy? Well, if I simply walk the walk and let the thoughts pass out of my mind without dwelling on them or fantasizing about them, then that is likely all that I need to do. A day or so later (and a few prayers of 'Jesus, please keep me sober') my thoughts and desires will level out, and I'll be back to normal.

In other cases, the source of the spike in lustful thoughts and desires can be less obvious. One such influence can be biological. Everyone reading this is likely aware that females experience normal monthly fluctuations in the amount of estrogen in their bodies. What many of you may not be aware of is that men have a similar periodic fluctuation in the levels of testosterone in their bodies. You take a normal man and flood his system with an increase in testosterone, and you are going to have a big increase in sexual desire. In some cases, an increase in your sexual thoughts and desires can be attributed to this fact alone. If you have examined your environment, behavior,

and emotional state, and can't find anything that might be contributing to a sudden sharp increase in sexual thoughts, desires, and temptations, then (assuming you are male) you could be experiencing the results of a natural periodic spike in testosterone. Women can experience a similar, but not altogether identical, spike in sexual desire with their own natural biological cycles.

Another scenario that can prove difficult to assess, particularly for someone just starting out in recovery, is when there is a combination of influences that collectively produce a rise in illicit sexual desires and thoughts. Imagine a pond that has frozen over. The ice isn't a foot thick, but it can hold a fair amount of weight. You begin placing bricks, one at a time, in a pile on the ice. One brick, two bricks, three bricks – the ice holds, and nothing happens. Five bricks, six bricks, seven bricks – suddenly you begin seeing signs of stress in the ice. Maybe a crack or two appears, but the ice holds. Eight bricks, nine bricks, ten bricks – then suddenly the ice that was fine and dandy with six bricks breaks, and all the bricks plunge into the icy water.

In the above illustration, the ice represents our program, our ability to resist acting out. The bricks represent triggering influences that increase illicit sexual thoughts and desires. The crash into the icy waters represents acting out – when we finally give in to the tempting thoughts and desires and act out with pornography or another form of unhealthy sexual activity. The point in the illustration where the ice first begins to show signs of stress, maybe a crack or two, is the point where we see an increase in illicit, unhealthy sexual desires and thoughts in our lives.

This illustration helps demonstrate why it is so important to do our part to keep illicit, unhealthy sexual thoughts and desires to a minimum. If left unchecked, these triggering thoughts and desires can lead to acting out with pornography or other forms of unhealthy sexual activity. In this chapter, we are focusing on the bricks themselves. Identifying what the bricks are (i.e. where the thoughts are coming from) is key to ensuring that they don't get put on the ice (i.e. put in our minds) in the first place.

Everyone has the occasional disagreement with a spouse or significant other, everyone has some stress at work now and then, and everyone occasionally sees some

sexually charged advertisements on TV, the internet, or the check-out line at the local grocery store. Taken by themselves, each of these things is a normal part of life that wouldn't necessarily lead to a spike in unhealthy sexual thoughts and desires. Now let's imagine that you normally view three news websites on any given day. Let's suppose that there has been an increase during the past week in the number of stories on those sites that have sexually charged or contain salacious images or advertisements. You don't go there to view porn, but you do see the images on the screen. Add a brick on the ice. This same week, you and the wife have been having an argument about finances that is still going on. Add two more bricks on the ice. Finally, the annual Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue just came out and is displayed prominently in the local grocery store checkout line. You don't pick it up, but you see the revealing cover on your way out the checkout line. Add another brick. You are conditioned to dealing with a two-brick week, but now you've got a four-brick week going on. The extra stressors/triggers in your life can lead to a spike in unhealthy sexually explicit thoughts and desires in a heartbeat. And if your body is already in a natural upswing in your testosterone levels – add a couple of more bricks on that ice!

I hope this illustration helps you see that it can be the little foxes that are spoiling the grapes. A multitude of lesser influences that aren't all that out of the ordinary taken by themselves can be conspiring to cause a potentially dangerous situation for your sexual sobriety. How do you deal with it? First, you need to have the knowledge and skill required to identify these influences. Reading this book (and others) and attending a good recovery program can help you develop this skill. Secondly, you need to use that skill and spend some time thinking about your life to enumerate the influences that are currently impacting you today. Thirdly, you need to adjust your program accordingly so that you have fewer bricks on the ice.

How would I attack the previous scenario? I would look at those bricks that are most easily under my control, and then move them off the ice. I can easily modify my internet usage for a week so that I don't see those images. I can do this by either using a text-only web browser utility like Textise.net or by skipping the news sites for a week

(don't worry, the world will still be here if you don't read the news for a week). I can intentionally determine that I will direct my gaze to somewhere else other than the magazine rack when I go to the grocery store – easy peasy. I can exercise my body more frequently this week to burn off some of that natural increase in testosterone. I've taken a few bricks off of the ice by this point, and will likely experience a drastic decrease in unhealthy sexual thoughts and desires in a couple of days if I implement all of these changes. You may even think about apologizing to your wife for being such a jerk to her about the finances – that might even lead to a healthy outlet for your sexual tension (no, I haven't been eavesdropping on your conversations with your spouse).

While you cannot stop all unhealthy sexual thoughts and desires from entering your life, you do have great influence over the frequency and power that these thoughts and desires possess. By working your recovery program and implementing some of the strategies I mention in this chapter, you can maintain sexual sobriety and avoid setting yourself up for a slip-up (i.e. avoid acting out with pornography). If you want to be free from the destructive grip of addiction to pornography, you must deal proactively with your illicit sexual thoughts and desires. Forewarned is forearmed. God's peace.

Chapter 13 – The Difference between Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness is an often abused word. Many people, I have discovered, have a mistaken idea about what forgiveness is. Let me start by discussing some things that forgiveness is *not*. Forgiveness is *not* pretending that someone who abused you in the past is suddenly safe and trustworthy, it isn't forgetting what they did, and it doesn't require that you unconditionally give them a second chance. This probably goes against everything you have ever heard on the topic of forgiveness. I hope, in this chapter, to be able to help dispel the myth and bring the light of truth to bear on the topic so that you, dear reader, can proceed in your recovery on level ground.

I agree with the good book on this point – you should forgive everybody. Life is too short to be walking around with bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness in your heart. Someone rightly said once that not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die. It just doesn't work that way. If you harbor unforgiveness in your heart towards someone, it ends up hurting you and not the other person. If you refuse to forgive someone, you are giving them power over you that they probably don't deserve. They then have the power to make you unhappy and bitter simply because of your unforgiveness. Forgive them, and take back your happiness and serenity.

Forgiving someone doesn't mean you are absolving them of responsibility for what they have done; it simply means you are not going to make them the arbiter of your happiness or decide that you won't be happy until they undo what they did or are punished for it. Face it; they can't undo what they did. Expecting them to is a pipe dream. The only way forward is forgiveness.

During my journey of recovery I had some family members who did and said things that were very detrimental to my recovery, and damaging to myself, my wife, and my children. I confronted them about what they had done individually. To a person, they became defensive, and none of them has acknowledged that what they did was wrong as of this writing. I chose to forgive them for what they did and move on. I

don't wish any harm to come to them, nor am I going to seek to punish them for what they did. I did, however, put limits on the amount of time that I will choose to allow myself and my wife and children to spend with them. These boundaries are to protect myself and my family from the effects of their dysfunction, and not to punish them for their misdeeds. This is what healthy forgiveness looks like. Forgiveness does *not* mean that you allow someone who is unstable or operating in toxic dysfunction to have unfettered access to you, your family, or your property.

Now, let's take a look at reconciliation. Reconciliation is the process of restoring a relationship between two people that has been damaged. Where forgiveness is a one-way street that only requires action by the person who was wronged, reconciliation is a two-way street. For a relationship to be reconciled, the person who offended the other person must a) acknowledge that what they did was wrong, b) ask for and receive forgiveness for what they have done, and c) make amends, or restitution for what they have done, if possible.

Some people will expect that once you decide to forgive them for past offenses, that you should restore to them all of their previous privileges and trust them just as you formerly did, even though they may not have taken any of the steps required for reconciling the relationship with you. That is insane, inappropriate, and dysfunctional. Maybe a parent abused you, and in the process of your recovery, you go to them and tell them that you forgive them. That's a great thing. It can bring healing to you, and some measure of healing to your relationship with that parent. However, if that parent doesn't acknowledge that what they did was wrong or seek to make amends in any way, it is unlikely that there will be some great improvement in your relationship. Suppose they were a drunk and had a wreck in which you were physically injured, and now that you have forgiven them they want to start babysitting your kids and driving them around town. Furthermore, they want to do this without ever admitting that what they did was wrong or joining AA or pursuing their recovery to change their abusive and dangerous ways. You would be a fool to trust them with your kids. It doesn't mean you haven't forgiven them; it simply means they have not fully reconciled

the relationship so that a suitable level of trust has been re-established. Their lack of genuine and thoughtful repentance does not justify the level of trust they are now asking you to extend to them.

Back to the example I mentioned previously concerning some family members. Due in part to their toxic and hurtful actions combined with the problems my wife and I had, my marriage almost ended. But thanks to our Higher Power, some genuine miracles happened, and my wife and I made it through and stayed together. After the storm in my marriage was beginning to subside, these relatives wanted to resume the same privileges and familiarity that they had before. They never acknowledged that anything they did was wrong, they never asked for forgiveness, and they never sought to make amends or rebuild the relationships that they had walked all over. And yet, they acted hurt – shocked even – when my wife and I put boundaries in place that limited the time we spent with them and the access that they had to our kids. We had forgiven them for what they did, but we no longer trusted them in the same way that we had previously. They had proven that they were not safe people for our kids or us to be intimately involved with, and they had made no effort to acknowledge that or change their toxic ways.

I wish it weren't so, but there will be those people in your life on your road to recovery that will seek to bully and badger you into giving them the privileges and benefits of reconciliation without lifting a finger to earn it. Forgiveness is free to the offender, and often costly to the offended. However, reconciliation is earned by the efforts of both. If anyone tells you differently, they don't know what they are talking about.

If you don't trust someone or don't feel safe letting someone in your life in the way they are pressuring you to, don't just ignore those feelings. Those feelings deserve to be heard. It may take you a while to discern exactly why you don't trust them or don't feel right letting them have access into your life the way that they want to, but it is important that you give yourself the time and get the help you need to figure it out. Many times our emotions are telling us things that our minds don't yet comprehend.

With good counsel, time, and prayer to your Higher Power, you'll likely discover what it is, and then you can address the situation in a healthy way instead of letting yourself be further abused or taken advantage of.

On second chances

If someone does pursue reconciliation with you, there will likely come a point where they want to be given a second chance. In many cases, if the person has acknowledged what they have done, has apologized or asked for forgiveness, and has demonstrated evidence of changed behavior, there is a good case to be made that giving them a second chance could be the right thing to do. However, in my opinion, there are some situations where a second chance should not be on the table. One such situation, in particular, is when someone has abused a child sexually. There are some things that are too precious to risk in life. The safety and wellbeing of the children God has entrusted to you fall into that category. If anyone has abused children sexually, even if they have served their time in jail and gone through a sex addiction recovery program, I don't think they should ever be trusted to be in a situation again where they could be alone with kids. Their character may have indeed changed, that's between them and God, but I wouldn't leave them alone with kids under any circumstances.

Sometimes full reconciliation doesn't happen in this life, and I've learned to live with that. This can happen either because the person who made the offense doesn't do their part to reconcile with the person they have offended, or because the risk to allow that person the trust they formerly had is just too great. I encourage you to forgive everyone – there is no need to carry around that bitterness and anger in your own life, it only weighs you down and poisons your soul. But I also encourage you not to reconcile unless the situation warrants it. Give yourself permission to protect yourself and those you love from abuse.

On seeking to reconcile with those you have wronged

Now that we have established a working knowledge of what forgiveness and reconciliation are, we can examine how the shoe looks on the other foot. As people pursuing recovery from an addiction to pornography, you and I have done our fair share of hurting others. Don't think so? What about the time and attention we should have been giving to our family or to our jobs that we spent binge watching porn? What about the unrealistic demands we placed on our spouses to fulfill the twisted hypersexual, and maybe even dangerous sexual desires we had as a result of pursuing our addiction? What about the healthy intimacy we denied our spouse because we were getting our fix on the web or from a magazine? How about the hypocrisy of pretending to be one person while we were living a double life? That's hurt people too. What about the support for a multi-billion dollar industry known for abusing women. Our participation in that industry provided a profit motive for the perpetrators of that abuse to continue their heinous business. Just surf the free stuff you say? It may be free to you, but there are plenty of advertisers paying to advertise to you while you are looking at that free porn – you're still not off the hook.

Hey, nobody said recovery was going to be a cakewalk. You and I are guilty of all the above and more. If we have dealt with toxic shame, hopefully, we are now at a place where we can examine our actions objectively and accept the appropriate responsibility for what we have done. Once we do that, guess what? We need to start the process of asking for forgiveness, making amends, and seeking reconciliation where appropriate.

Delving into this process further is beyond the scope of this book. However, I felt it would be hypocritical to talk about giving forgiveness to others and holding them accountable for reconciling with us for the ways they hurt us without looking at both sides of the fence. Bottom line: work your program, and when you get to steps 8, 9, and 10 in a good twelve step recovery program (the steps dealing with making amends to those we have harmed), work those steps like there is no tomorrow.

Chapter 14 – How Not to Be Your Own Worst Enemy

In one recovery group that I was a part of, there was an individual whom I will call 'Bob' (not his real name). Bob was in his late forties and was a very smart and successful professional, who also happened to have a sexual addiction. This particular group was a Life Recovery group, and we studied the Life Recovery Guide and followed their group principles. Additionally, we studied various other books on the topic of sexual addiction. No matter what book we were studying or what topic was being discussed, Bob was always able to provide chapter and verse on it. He could quote the principles, tell you what each author said about whatever topic being discussed – the guy was a walking encyclopedia on sexual addiction recovery. But Bob never seemed to have any long term sobriety.

As I recall, it seemed that Bob reported having lost sobriety within the last week or so at practically every meeting he ever attended. I eventually learned that Bob had been attending sex addiction recovery groups for about fifteen years at that point, but he still wasn't seeing long term victory. Now, to be fair, Bob had made improvement from when he started. He had apparently stopped the most harmful forms of acting out that initially brought him to the recovery group, but he was still breaking sobriety on a regular basis to consume pornographic material. What was the problem?

After sitting in many group recovery meetings with Bob, I began to see some of the chinks in his armor. As I continued to gain sobriety, Bob continued on what appeared to be an endless loop of attending meetings, getting a week or so of sobriety, and breaking sobriety again and again. And yet, I noticed that no matter who was sharing in the group, Bob always had the answer to what they were doing wrong or what they should do differently to get better. Now, those of you who are new to recovery may not know, but this is commonly called cross-talk, or working someone else's program – something strictly forbidden in most twelve-step recovery groups. We are there to support each other, not to fix one another (a lesson for another chapter).

The group leader, to his credit, corrected Bob time and time again. Finally, it got

so bad that he was temporarily banned from the meetings for the constant cross-talk. I later learned that this wasn't the first time Bob had been banned from the group for the same behavior.

Bob, you see, was his own worst enemy. It wasn't the demons that plagued him, or the temptations that surrounded him, or the other people in his life that weren't living the way that they should that kept Bob from getting free from his addiction – it was Bob himself. One of Bob's main problems was pride. He wasn't a humble guy. Even in the midst of his continued failure to experience long-term sobriety, I never heard him express real remorse or contrition. It was always someone else's fault. His frequent scapegoat was his wife, how she wasn't giving him the physical affection he desired (a fact that directly stemmed from his previous behavior in acting out – another fact I learned later). He often mentioned this as an excuse right before he confessed to having broken sobriety again.

So why do I share this story? Bob's story illustrates something that I have seen played out time and time again in my own life and in the lives of many people with whom I have been in recovery. Time and time again I have seen guys plateau in their program, having made some progress, but then seeming unable to get any farther in their quest for increased sobriety. After considering why this seems to occur, I have come down to two main ingredients: pride and lack of desire.

To put a positive spin on it, I have never seen anyone in a good recovery program who wants to change and who is truly willing to humbly work their program that didn't get progressively better over time. If you possess the humility to submit to the wisdom of others in the program who have more sobriety than you do and the desire to be free from your addiction to pornography, you can be free.

Time and time again I've seen guys come with a particular issue who are given sound advice (which they often ask for) about how to address their particular situation. They implement the advice for a while and achieve great results. Maybe it's a boundary about not surfing the internet after 6:00 p.m. or something like that. They do this for a while and see a precipitous drop in acting out. They begin to achieve one,

two, three weeks of sobriety. Then the bottom drops out. They begin reading the news sites after the wife has gone to bed, and in no time they are reporting that they binge-watched six hours of pornography on the internet. Why did they stop doing something that was working, even by their own admission? I have come to believe that in the majority of cases it is because, deep down, they aren't yet committed to being free no matter what the cost. At that moment when they are faced with continuing to limit their freedom willingly by not viewing the internet after 6:00 p.m., they decide that they value their freedom to surf the internet more than they value their freedom from addiction to pornography.

Like Bob Dylan famously said, "Everybody gotta serve somebody sometime." True freedom is only the ability to choose whom you will obey, not *if* you will obey. Obeying yourself is what you've been doing that got you into this mess in the first place. If you want to get out, you will have to choose to obey someone else. Like it or not, you will obey someone. Who's it gonna be?

When a person in recovery truly hits bottom, they will begin to change and begin a successful journey to freedom from pornography. You can have several 'bottoms' on your journey to freedom, but each one is significant and is followed by increased sobriety. Sometimes this sobriety can take a while to manifest, but just ask anyone who has been in recovery for anything - pornography, alcohol - you name it - and they will tell you that they can trace long term sobriety back to a time when they hit bottom. Hitting bottom, simply put, is getting to the place where you want to be free from your addiction bad enough to do anything so that you can be free, and you are humble enough to quit thinking you know jack squat about how to do it. When you get to that point, you are finally ready to heed the advice of others in your recovery group who are farther along than you are in sobriety, which almost always leads to increased sobriety for yourself.

When I first started recovery, I came to that first group a humbled man who was ready to change. I recall saying at the time that if they told me I would get free from my addiction by eating grass, then I was going to eat grass. I followed the teaching and

advice from the recovery materials and the group leaders, and I began seeing rapid and significant freedom from my addiction. If you come to recovery with the same attitude and willingness, I am convinced that you will too. It won't be easy, but it sure as heck beats getting the life sucked out of you and losing every important relationship in your life because of your addiction to pornography. Believe me, I've been there, and I know.

I've been in recovery for a little over nine years now. I've been sober from acting out with pornography for years, yet there are other addictive habits I've discovered along the way that needed to be addressed. One particular addictive habit had, until recently, plagued me for the entire time I had been in recovery. No matter what I did, it seemed to keep hanging on. The frequency of acting out in this particular way had decreased dramatically over the years, but it had never been truly vanquished. I struggled and struggled to identify why I had continued to act out in this way. I mean, I had been in recovery for years and seen years of long term sobriety from alcohol and pornography, so why had this little pesky habit still been hanging around?

I've thought about this extensively, and come up with a variety of possibilities over the years. Eventually, I realized that the truth was that I had continued to give myself an excuse for the behavior. There was always a reason why it was so difficult to give it up completely. Resist as I might – and I did resist the temptation frequently – I would always end up giving in sooner or later. A little over three months ago I finally hit bottom with this behavior. I finally decided that I no longer cared about the temporary benefit that I was achieving by continuing the behavior at the expense of true freedom. I finally decided that, regarding that bad habit, I wanted to be free from it no matter what. I am happy to report that since that time I have not participated in that behavior. As of this writing, it has been a little over three months since I have acted out in that behavior – by far the longest period of sobriety from it that I can ever recall. I'm not just pulling this stuff out of a hat. I'm living it. I want to encourage you that it works for me, it has worked for countless others – a number of whom I have known personally – and it will work for you if you are ready to humble yourself and work your program in a good recovery group.

Chapter 15 – Learning to Stop Controlling Behaviors

At its core, addiction is about manipulation and control. We addicts are trying to achieve a certain outcome that we believe is favorable, for whatever reason. The pornography addict wants to be loved, accepted, feel the rush of the feel-good chemicals that flood their brains when engaging in sexual activity. The addict in us wants to temporarily escape our current situation in life, possibly avoid dealing with troubling issues in our all-too-real-life relationships, all the while avoiding the possibility of rejection. We want to be the star of the show and accepted for who we are – and be totally in control of the whole process. Who wouldn't want that?! Except for the price tag, which is when the servant becomes the master and our lives predictably begin to fall apart.

So we finally think we've had enough and join a good recovery group. We begin seeing some real progress in slaying the dragon and get some long term sobriety under our belts. *Finally*, we think to ourselves, *at last, I'm free*. But many of us aren't fully free – at least not yet. The desire to manipulate and control is just too intricately intertwined with our very natures to be removed quite so easily. As we progress in recovery – and it may be years of sobriety later before we recognize it – we begin to see the telltale signs of the underlying addiction. The underlying addiction to control.

As I've stated before, I've been living sober from pornography, alcohol, and some other addictive behaviors for many years. I have even taught on recovery and led recovery groups where I've discussed this very topic – how addiction is really about control. But it wasn't until almost two years ago that I came to discover that I was still addicted to control in a very real and destructive way.

My wife and I have always had our disagreements over finances, just as many couples do. Neither of us has felt completely satisfied with our joint financial lives, but we have muddled along in a sort of uneasy truce. A couple of years ago, I came to a point where I decided that enough was enough. I was determined that this time, we were going to get our financial house in order come hell or high water (that's code for begin doing things my way once and for all). After many months of making what I

thought were genuine and benevolent attempts to resolve our financial differences peacefully, we were still in a standoff. Then, I hatched what I thought was the perfect plan to force my wife's hand and achieve the desired result. Of course, I wasn't in a place where I could see how narrow-minded, controlling, and manipulative I was being, nor did I perceive how damaging my actions were going to be to the trust in our relationship.

My plan was simple. I would move all of the money out of our joint account into a new account which I alone controlled, thus forcing us to work together to come up with a financial plan that we both agreed to abide by. Many of you will no doubt immediately see that this was a recipe for destruction. I, on the other hand, thought it was sheer brilliance. You can imagine how my wife did not see it the same way.

After our initial confrontation concerning what I had done, I began to see the light. I won't say I saw it from the same perspective of my wife or understood how controlling it had been right then, but I did get the point about how it was an ignorant and destructive move on my part. I immediately reversed the financial shenanigans, but the emotional destruction I caused is still in the process of being repaired to this day.

I share this real and painful story from my own life so that you will hear me when I say with all sincerity that just because you get free from your addiction to pornography doesn't mean your work of recovery is complete. Your addiction to pornography didn't begin in a vacuum. Pornography may be the most obviously destructive tool of choice in your life right now, but trust me, there are other areas of your life where the destructive underlying addiction to control is still at work. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to ferret them out and nail the coffin shut on the addiction to control in your life for good. This message will self-destruct in thirty seconds (sorry, just had to throw that in there).

Hopefully, you will choose to do this before you damage the significant relationships in your life any more than you already have - possibly beyond your ability to see them repaired in this life. The good news is that, with a stout heart and

some support from your fellow travelers along the road to recovery, finding out where to begin is not that hard. If you will ask your wife/husband/significant other and/or your sponsor/best friend or business partner to tell you if they can see any controlling or manipulative behaviors in your life, you will likely have some good starting points. Your spouse, if they are not too terrified to tell you the truth, will likely be able to name several off the top of their head. However, if you use fear to control others (as is quite likely the case), you may have a harder time getting those closest to you to tell you the truth, and may even convince yourself that I am full of bull excrement and that you don't have a controlling bone in your body. And yes, the wallflower who wouldn't hurt a fly but would withhold physical affection from their mate when they don't get their way is using fear to control someone else's behavior just as much as the wife-beater. I won't debate the fact that the wife-beater's tactics are more heinous as they can lead to permanent physical harm and death, but they are both acts of fear-based manipulation and control.

If a word to the wise is indeed sufficient, then those who are open to hearing the truth have likely already gotten the point, so I won't beat a dead horse. Remember, the truth is out there concerning your (and my) sneaky control-freak behaviors – if we have the temerity to seek it. In that vein, I offer the following book that I have found tremendously helpful in rooting out my addiction to control and gaining ground on the battlefield of my life in hopes of eventually raising the flag of victory over the dead body of this malevolent beast:

Miller, J. Keith (1997). *Compelled to Control: Recovering Intimacy in Broken Relationships*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications Inc.

I purchased my copy as an ebook via Amazon.com for Kindle, but the trade paper ISBN is 1-55874-461-4 for those so inclined. I wish you much success.

Epilogue

I hope you have benefited from this brief work on pornography addiction. I tried to select topics that I thought would be of immediate and significant impact for anyone pursuing freedom from the destructive addiction to pornography. Alas, there are many more topics that I could have covered, and I'll likely think of something I would like to have included as soon as I publish this book. However, I already have a follow-up book to this planned, so you can be on the lookout for at least one more book by yours truly at some point in the future.

Should you desire to contact me, I can be reached at the following email address: CreativeWriting777@outlook.com. I wish you all the best in your recovery.

Thanks

There are too many people to thank, and since I'm writing this under a pseudonym, it wouldn't be smart to name them anyway. However, I do wish to thank my sponsor, those pastors who helped point me in the right direction and pray for me, my persevering wife, my kids, all of the members of the various recovery groups that I have been a part of over the years who have helped me along in my recovery, and the churches that graciously sponsored these groups. Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank God for giving me a string of second chances, both past, present, and future.

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