

Clean Hands, Pure Heart

Overcoming Addiction to Pornography
through the Redeeming Power of Jesus Christ

Philip A. Harrison

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My first acknowledgment must go to my first wife, Kathy Francis Harrison, who introduced me to the principles of the Twelve Steps, and showed me how beautifully they correspond to the principles of the gospel, especially faith and repentance. Kathy showed me through her life's example the efficacy of these principles. Furthermore, when I finally admitted my need for help with my own addiction, she graciously stood by me in spite of the pain I caused her. I wish I had the space in this book to share the tender story of how, just five months after introducing me to the recovery program that would save my life, Kathy silently laid down her own burden of mortality. After decades of bravely carrying on her struggle with a damaged heart, including two open-heart surgeries and countless doctor visits, it was finally enough. I wish I could also share with you the miracle of how, from the other side of the veil, Kathy played such a powerful role in my subsequent marriage to Colleen, who had been such a friend and mentor to us both in the months before Kathy's passing. It is a story worth telling, but it will have to wait for another time.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK AS A STUDY GUIDE

I make no secret of the fact that I have patterned this book after *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*, by Colleen C. Harrison. I hope this book can be used in the same ways her book is used, to help others come unto Christ and receive relief from addiction and other problems. If *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* reaches even a fraction of the number of people who have been blessed by *He Did Deliver Me*, I will be immensely grateful. In the same spirit that *He Did Deliver Me* has been applied, I suggest *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* may be used in the following ways:

First: In a personal recovery program by individuals seeking recovery from addiction to pornography or other sexual addictions.

Second: As a study guide for classes supervised by priesthood leaders in wards or stakes, or by professionals in a counseling setting. Covering one chapter each week, the class would run for 17 weeks.

Third: As study materials to be used in LDS Twelve Step groups. *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* has been designated as “Approved Literature” by Heart t’ Heart. Specific helps for Twelve Step meetings, including a sample meeting format, are included in Appendix C.

Fourth: As a reference guide for those seeking a greater understanding of sexual addiction, including spouses and other loved ones of addicts, priesthood leaders and professional counselors.

Fifth: By anyone who wishes to develop a closer, more personal and life-changing relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I pray that my experiences may help you on this same journey, whatever your personal challenges may be.

PREFACE

An epidemic of pornography and related inappropriate sexual behavior is sweeping over the earth, and sad to say, the saints are not escaping unscathed. The messages we hear with increasing regularity from our prophets are evidence of the scope of this problem. Quoting two earlier prophets, President Ezra Taft Benson wrote:

The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality. This, the Prophet Joseph said, would be the source of more temptations, more buffetings, and more difficulties for the elders of Israel than any other. (See *Journal of Discourses*, 8:55.)

President Joseph F. Smith said that sexual impurity would be one of the three dangers that would threaten the Church within—and so it does. (See *Gospel Doctrine*, pp. 312–13.) It permeates our society...

If we are to cleanse the inner vessel, we must forsake immorality and be clean. (Ezra Taft Benson, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 4–5)

In more recent years, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

We can reach out to strengthen those who wallow in the mire of pornography, gross immorality, and drugs. Many have become so addicted that they have lost power to control their own destinies. They are miserable and broken. They can be salvaged and saved. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 59)

I am writing this book as one who has experienced firsthand the plague of addiction to pornography. In fact, I endured thirty-five years of slavery to this vile degradation before I found the right combination of true principles that taught me how to come unto Christ and receive a remission of these sins. In overwhelming gratitude, I feel an intense desire to share with others my story and the principles that helped me.

As I prayed and pondered about what to include in *Clean Hands, Pure Heart*, I knew I wanted to emphasize the miracle of my recovery rather than the details of the addiction itself. I also knew there were enough books expounding the evils of pornography. Having read many of them myself, I felt acutely aware of the potential of engendering more evil by dwelling on it too explicitly. As Elder Boyd K. Packer has said:

The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 17)

If you are reading this book as a loved one of a sex addict, let me reassure you that I am keenly aware of your sorrow and your sensitivity toward these things. Like Jacob, I do not wish to **“enlarge the wounds of those who are already wounded” (Jacob 2:9)**, yet I fear I may have to run that risk. Addiction hides and thrives in the darkness of denial, rationalization, and minimization. If this book is to be of use to those suffering from this malady, I feel I must speak with plainness. Though I will not discuss in detail the behaviors that constitute sexual addiction, I will mention pornography and masturbation as I discuss the recovery process.

I recognize that I am taking a step into relatively uncharted territory within the Latter-day Saint community by revealing my own identity as one who has struggled with these demoralizing and degrading practices. Naturally, I wonder how my story will be received, but I feel reassured that my offering of total honesty will have a positive effect on many of my brothers and sisters who are seeking a way out of this trap. It is time that we all realize that it is Satan who revels in keeping sin a secret and isolating the sinner in shame. It is time that we share the glorious good news of Christ’s power to deliver us from addiction—even *sexual* addiction. I also trust that the Saints will be charitable toward my family members—parents, siblings, spouse, and children—and recognize, as I now do, that they do not deserve any blame or shame for my choices.

Ultimately, I am willing to disclose my own life story because I have felt the Savior invite me to do so. Like Paul and Alma the Younger, who also spent a portion of their lives in serious darkness and were delivered from it by Christ Himself, I am willing to allow my life to be an example of someone the Lord has rescued from “the darkest abyss.” Alma’s words ring out from the depths of my own heart:

My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more. (Mosiah 27:29)

If there are any who may think poorly of me for the mistakes I have made or for being so open in writing about them, I bear no ill will toward them. I will bear their disapproval for His name’s sake. He has truly changed my life. I owe Him everything. I am reborn and have no more disposition to indulge in sexual misbehavior. In other words, I need to thank the Lord publicly, in my own name, for in His own name He has redeemed my soul from hell. Together with Nephi, I declare:

**I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.
(2 Nephi 33:6)**

I share this witness with you in humble gratitude for the incomparable grace and love that has been extended to me by my Savior and Friend, in His holy name, even the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

— Philip A. Harrison

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
or who shall stand in his holy place?
He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart.

Psalm 24:3–4

Chapter

1

My Story

Hi. My name's Phil—and I'm in recovery from sexual addiction.

Since you are reading this book, I assume you are concerned about sexual addiction, either for your own sake or for the sake of someone you love. Perhaps you are concerned because you have a priesthood stewardship over someone struggling with a sexual addiction. Maybe this is the first book you have read on this subject, or maybe you've read several. Maybe you're beginning to feel desperate for a solution, rather than yet another rehearsal of the severity of the problem.

Pornography addiction and the practices which generally accompany it are difficult subjects to think about, much less write about. It causes embarrassment to those who haven't experienced it and shame to those who have. This is especially true in a society as dedicated to high moral and ethical standards and values as the Latter-day Saint community.

A Latter-day Saint who indulges in pornography knows, by the light of Christ and by the loss of the Holy Ghost, that he is doing wrong. Already in a state of inner spiritual hell, he can't face the thought of sharing his terrible secret with anyone else. If he mentions it at all, he minimizes it to priesthood leaders, who are as perplexed as he is about his total lack of self-control and his chronic return to the habit, requiring yet another confession. Eventually, he may give up telling

anyone. Unfortunately, this slide into withdrawal and isolation cuts him off from any possible help. So it was with me for many years.

Today, I am able to rejoice in abstinence from any deliberate exposure to pornography since November of 1999. Believe me, after over thirty-five years of slavery, trying and failing over and over again to free myself from this horrible bondage, I know my abstinence is absolutely nothing short of a miracle. I am thrilled as I watch the progressive restoration of a state of innocence that I thought I had lost forever. I can gratefully testify that the healing influence of the Savior's forgiveness and His marvelous Atonement have brought me to a place of rejoicing in His power, finally free from my sexual addiction. With Alma, I can truly say today that I am **“harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:19)** and that:

There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you,... that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as [is] my joy. (Alma 36:21)

I would like to share my testimony with each of you, heart to heart and soul to soul, that *there definitely is a solution*, and a blessed end to this problem. There is every reason to have hope for recovery from sexual addiction. I know, because I have lived it. In these pages I am going to offer you, step by step and concept by concept, the pathway that saved my life.

PUBERTY, LONELINESS AND INSECURITY

My sexual addiction began as I experienced the powerful feelings accompanying puberty and continued, as I said before, for over three decades, interrupted occasionally by short periods of repentance. I was a typical teenager, plagued with the normal onslaught of insecurities and anxieties that most teens experience. At the time though, I thought my plight was much worse than anyone else's. Prone to such self-pity, as well as self-doubt, I discovered masturbation. Although it drained me of all self-respect, it provided at least a temporary distraction from my fears and loneliness. Pornography was far less available at that time—in the

1960s—at least where I lived. Thus, although it was a smaller problem for me then, the seeds were planted for greater challenges later on.

As contradictory as it may sound, even while I was developing this addiction, I never doubted the truthfulness of the gospel, and I had a deep desire to serve a mission. As the time to submit my papers and receive my call approached, I made an increased effort to repent of what I thought of as a bad habit. Surely the time had come to put away childish things and I had no doubt I would be able to do so.

Just a few months before my mission call came, another reason to clean up my life became apparent. I met Kathy, the most wonderful young woman I had ever known. For a couple of months we were just good friends, but friendship eventually led to dating. Within weeks we both felt the Lord witness to us that we had each found our eternal companion. A desire to be worthy to take this precious girl to the temple as soon as I returned home from my mission sealed my resolve to forsake my unrighteous behaviors.

MISSION AND MARRIAGE— NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, OLD PROBLEMS

My mission to Germany was so exciting! I had no idea before I went that I would love the people, the place and the Lord's work so much. And I loved the Lord, deeply, sincerely. What could be better than serving Him so totally? It was challenging, but it was worth it. Yet, before my mission was half over, I had given in to my weakness once more. What had happened? I thought my problem was entirely in the past! How could I be so weak? Still, I didn't think the offense was *that* serious. I was stunned however, when in district meeting, our district leader brought up the issue and said that anyone struggling with masturbation needed to confess the problem directly to the mission president. In spite of my embarrassment, I had a deep desire to do the right thing. I took the district leader aside immediately after the meeting and told him I needed to talk with the mission president. Within minutes I was on the phone with him, making my confession. Gratefully, that was the end of my indulgence while on my mission.

Kathy and I married soon after my return home. While I loved being married, I was dismayed to find that marriage was not a cure-all for my addiction. Contrary to what I had expected, the adjustment to a legitimate sexual relationship was very difficult for me. In fact, my wife had a much healthier attitude about sex than I did. My earlier indulgence in pornography had twisted my perception of sexuality, convincing me that it was “dirty.” I began to realize that though I had abstained from the act of masturbation since my talk with my mission president, I hadn’t allowed my heart and mind to be made clean. I didn’t know how to become healed from those unhealthy attitudes.

Within a year or two of being married, I began to indulge in pornography again. I found it much easier to obtain than it had been in my teens. Our entire society was getting sicker, and I continued to sicken right along with it. As our family began to grow and the cares of work intensified, I found myself with more and more excuses to retreat into my secret world of sexual indulgence. Sensuality made me numb to everything else, distracting me with lust, then demoralizing me with inevitable bouts of remorse and self-loathing.

Looking back, it is plain to me that what I was practicing was nothing less than a form of insanity! Why would a person keep going back to something that made him feel like slime? Why would anyone choose to live in this secret hell? The whole situation is so ludicrous and insane that even the addict can’t explain why he continues in such slavery. Of course, in those years, I had no idea I was an addict. I thought I was a lot of things—a liar, a sham, a reprobate—but “addict” hadn’t dawned on me yet.

A NIGHTMARE OF TRYING AND FAILING

Over the next few decades I struggled frequently to give up what I considered to be merely a “bad habit.” I talked with my bishops and stake presidents over and over again in order to “clear things up.” Trying to encourage me and give me the benefit of the doubt, they always trusted I had fully repented and changed, and sometimes I even thought I had. Sooner or later though, the urge, the “need,” the desire would

return and I would act out again. I tried all kinds of what I have since come to realize were “half-measures” to manage and control my behavior. I rationalized so much that at one point I convinced myself that viewing pornography wasn’t *that* bad, if I did it without acting out physically. I also justified my actions by rationalizing that the things I was doing weren’t nearly as bad as what a lot of guys did. Eventually, all those lies numbed my conscience and I began to settle into a long, slow, downward slide.

As video rental stores opened and the Internet became available, I was sucked into the easy access to pornography and the relative anonymity they offered. I found myself making all kinds of excuses for getting home late “from work,” when the truth was I had been wandering video aisles trying to find explicit movies with innocent sounding titles (in case my wife saw them). Later, after the family had gone to bed, I would stay up late so I would be “free” to pursue my addiction. Free? *Free to become enslaved.* Addiction is such madness!

Every once in a while, I would hear the amazing transformation recorded in **Mosiah 5:2** and would feel a heart-wrenching longing to experience the same change of heart the people of King Benjamin did. Their hearts were so changed that these people literally had “**no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.**” Finally in a moment of overwhelming despair, I went to the Lord and pled with Him to relieve me of the “disposition” or desire to sin, begging Him to take it away. Much to my surprise and relief, I found the compulsion was lifted. A week went by, then another, without any craving to act out! Unaware of the truth that one must continue to exercise faith in Christ in order to *retain* this changed heart, I became complacent, assuming that everything was “taken care of.” Soon, however, the tensions and insecurities of everyday life began to build up again—and having no idea that I could take *those* feelings to the Lord also, my need for escape began to reassert itself, and I fell again. How could I do that after the Lord had made me clean? My shame and discouragement were even worse than before.

Having never considered the word “addict” in connection to my situation, I had no way of recognizing that I was caught in the classic

cycle of addiction, with its characteristic build-up of tension, acting out, remorse, repentance and eventual relapse. As I mentioned earlier, I would often go to my current bishop when I reached the repentance phase of the cycle and confess again...and again...and again. Little did any of us know that addiction could not be overcome by the level of repentance I was practicing. It wasn't that my repentance wasn't sincere; it was sincere as far as it went. It just didn't go far enough. It would be years before I learned there must be a complete *remission* of sin administered by the Lord Himself if I was to have a changed heart. Trying to change my habits simply wasn't enough.

In this spiritually sloppy way, I was able to justify holding a temple recommend most of the time. Still, my conscience often led me to put restrictions on myself. For months at a time I would not attend the temple because I did not feel worthy. I avoided opportunities to give blessings to my family and others, and occasionally outright declined when asked. Curiously, my opportunities to serve in church callings also diminished. I had no comprehension of how my addiction was draining every bit of spirituality out of my life. Living the half-truth, half-lie of my life was nothing short of a nightmare, but one from which I couldn't wake up. Even at 40, when I was offered the blessing and privilege of being ordained a high priest, I was still juggling reality and had more to confess. Hoping to motivate me to abandon my weakness once and for all, the stake president delayed my ordination. He wanted me to have a few months to *really* repent. Embarrassed and ashamed, I readily complied and was eventually "worthy" to be ordained. Unfortunately, my repentance was still not "recovery." After my ordination, the pressure to stay clean was off, and I let down my guard again—and once more began to act out. The fact that I was now a high priest only added to my shame.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF MY SLAVERY

It is always marvelous to me to look back from my vantage point of today, and recognize the hand of the Lord preparing my rescue from the clutches of addiction years before I was ready to allow myself to be

rescued. I can see how He mercifully led me, step by step, to recovery through the instrumentality of my sweetheart, Kathy.

You see, Kathy knew something of addictive behavior herself, though she, too, didn't know to call it that at first. As a young girl she had developed a dependency on overeating as a means to get through her life's stresses. Needless to say, with several babies in quick succession, little money, and supporting me while I finished graduate school, Kathy lived with intense stress during the early years of our marriage. Her overeating and subsequent weight gain troubled both of us. Then one day she told me about a new group she had learned about, Overeaters Anonymous (OA). It was a support group that applied the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to the challenges of compulsive overeating.

I'd never heard of OA before and was unfamiliar with AA and the Twelve Steps. Besides, I was still hard pressed to finish graduate school and reluctant to commit to babysit so Kathy could attend meetings. But on the other hand, it was free, and I knew how desperate she was to find some kind of help, so I finally agreed. As the first weeks passed, I was gratified that she actually began to find relief from her compulsive behavior. Line upon line, she shared with me what she was learning about the Twelve Steps. It was obvious to us both that each step represented a true gospel principle—faith, repentance, rebirth. Still, as insane as it seems to me now, I could not see any need for such a program in my own life. The thought that my problem with pornography could also be defined as an addictive or compulsive behavior never crossed my mind. It's truly amazing how deeply into denial addiction can drag us. I was so ready to admit my wife's weakness and her need, but I could not (or *would* not) see the shrinking of my own soul, as year after year I persisted in my own degradation.

By the spring of 1998, at the age of fifty, I could no longer deny the spiritual death into which my sins were plunging me. The voice of the liar, the enemy of my soul, had become almost audible. When the Lord's Spirit would invite me to participate in some spiritual activity, such as praying or reading the scriptures, the adversary's tempting, taunting voice would cry, "Oh, don't do *that*. That will spoil our fun! If you do

that, you won't feel like *playing* anymore." Finally, there came a day when I felt the negative influence I was harboring inside of me recoil at the very mention of the Savior's name! Instantly, I knew it was not *me* having such a reaction to the Savior. It was then I realized that something or someone who *hated* Him was taking possession of my mind, of my soul. I knew I had never been in such spiritual danger. If something dramatic didn't happen soon, I would be lost! In despair, I began to picture the certain result of continuing in my present course. Unlike drugs or alcohol, this secret destroyer wouldn't kill me early. I imagined what it would be like to be an old man, maybe in my eighties or nineties, robbed of all integrity and dignity, still a slave to my lust for unrighteous sex. I had heard of men like that. Furthermore, I began to conclude it was only a matter of time before my behavior finally crossed the line into adultery, and I would be excommunicated. Hope for anything better was all but dead in me.

Mercifully however, the Lord was about to give me another chance to grab hold of the true principles that had saved Kathy from her overeating. Once again, just as she had years before, Kathy began to share her excitement with me about yet another Twelve Step program she had recently learned about. She said it was called Heart t' Heart, and it was designed especially for Latter-day Saints. It coordinated the principles in the Twelve Steps with the teachings of the prophets and the Book of Mormon. There was even a support meeting just 15 minutes away in a neighboring community.

Despite my discouraged state, there awoke a tiny flicker of belief in me that I might still receive a remission of my sins and escape this terrible disease of the soul. After Kathy attended her first Heart t' Heart meeting, I tentatively asked her if I could go to the next meeting with her. Perplexed, she replied, "It's fine for you to go with me, but I don't know why you would want to." In her desire to believe the best about me over the years, she had apparently repressed any fear of my "problem." Though she had caught me watching a sleazy movie once, she had willingly accepted my excuses and remained oblivious to the extent of my degradation. Suddenly, then and there, I was faced with the first step on my journey of recovery. I had to take the terrifying risk

of getting honest with this special woman whom I so deeply loved and admired, but whom I had so deeply wronged. Somehow, by the grace of God, I found the courage to tell her why I needed to attend the Heart t' Heart meetings. She listened quietly and although I could tell she was saddened and hurt, she expressed her hope and faith that these principles would help me, and that my life could be turned around and healed. After my confession to her, I noticed she was nervous whenever I was on the computer, but even so, she resisted the impulse to step in and assume responsibility for my recovery. She gave me room to grow. She knew the power of these principles and was willing to give them time to work in my life as they had in hers. Whether it was her Twelve Step recovery or her basic Christ-like nature that let her respond to me with such patience and compassion, I don't know, but I continually thank the Lord for it. My tutoring in the Twelve Steps began with her merciful example.

Together, Kathy and I attended Heart t' Heart meetings and began to read the study guide, *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*. We often stayed after the weekly meetings for long discussions with its author, Colleen. Through a combination of those meetings and our personal study and prayer, our appreciation of these gospel principles and their power to open our hearts to the Savior's atoning power grew rapidly. We also eagerly listened to audio tapes of Heart t' Heart's previous annual conferences. I cannot express the extent of my amazement as I heard the testimonies of other Latter-day Saint men and women who were recovering from a number of addictions, *including sexual addiction*. A feeling began to stir within me that I almost didn't recognize, I had been so long without it. It was hope!

COMING TO LOVE THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY

Today, I recall those first experiences as the equivalent of being brought back from the brink of spiritual death. One meeting at a time, I felt my life slowly beginning to change. Week by week, month by month, as one false belief after another began to fade from my heart and mind, I began to feel alive again. I started feeling a willingness to partic-

ipate in spiritual activities once more. I began to pray sincerely, with real intent. I started to enjoy the uplifting feeling I found while reading the scriptures.

Though total abstinence did not come immediately, the episodes of acting out began to happen less and less often, until I finally realized that the Lord had blessed me with the miracle I had sought for over thirty long years. I began experiencing an abstinence that was lasting, and with it, an overwhelming feeling of freedom and peace.

I'd like to finish my story with a verse of scripture that years ago used to depress me, because I had no idea *how* to come unto Christ. Today, the words of this verse have become a part of my own personal reality. I have lived to see these words fulfilled in my own life:

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

Thank you for letting me share my story with you. There are many people with similar stories, but this one is mine. Let me now invite you to continue with me in the following chapters to consider some of the principles that have helped me along this journey. I fervently pray that they may bless your life as well.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER

At the end of each chapter in this book, you will find a section called "Making the Most of This Chapter." In these sections, I will invite you to do some personal reflecting and writing about what you have read. Please pay close attention to these invitations, as the reflection and writing will make a huge difference in how much you get out of this book. Change is an internal process, one that is not reached by merely taking in information by reading. In order for that information to have

the power to change us, it has to be assimilated into our innermost selves. That is the goal of these short writing assignments.

I suggest you get a special journal for recovery writing. Call it a “recovery journal” if you like. Use it to record the insights that come to you as the Lord “**shows [you your] weakness**” (Ether 12:27). The questions at the end of each chapter will stimulate your thinking and give you things to write about. Space for writing is not provided here because people will vary in how much space they need. Even so, please consider this a workbook and do the writing exercises in your recovery journal. If you decide the writing is just too much, too soon—that you are not ready for this level of introspection and honesty—please read through *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* to the end. Then come back and go through it a second time, doing the writing. You will find you gain much more when you write about your thoughts and feelings.

Those of you who do not struggle with sexual addiction, but are reading this book out of concern for a loved one, can still benefit from answering these questions. All of us struggle with something, whether it’s an actual addiction, a bad habit, or just life in general. Feel free to insert any problem in place of the references to sexual addiction and answer the questions accordingly.

Now for some questions relating to this chapter:

1. Write about your response to my story. If there were things to which you related, what were they? In what ways is your story different from mine?
2. Write a brief outline of your own story. When did you become aware of sex? Did you learn more from your parents or from your peers? How much of what you “learned” later turned out to be wrong? Have you adopted any sexual behaviors you might consider to be addictions?
3. Did your parents talk to you about sex? Did you feel you could ask them questions? (If the answer is “No,” don’t feel bad. You have lots and lots of company!) Write about your communications with your

parents (or other adults, such as teachers or church leaders) about sex.

4. If you could picture your Heavenly Parents sitting down with you to tell you about sex, how do you imagine it? Write down some of the things you think they might say.
5. Write about what you would like to get out of this book. What understanding would you like to gain? What changes in your life would you like to see happen?

Chapter 2

Undoing the Lies About God

Once I was willing to face the truth, admit I was addicted to pornography and let go of the lie that it was only a bad habit, I also had to admit that acquiring “clean hands” (a change in my actions) would require me to confront a lot of other lies with which I had become infected over my lifetime. The process of cleansing my heart would involve changing my beliefs as well.

CHAINS MADE OF LIES

Addiction is a terrible condition of spiritual bondage that undermines our agency and gradually enslaves us by dragging us deeper and deeper into a way of life based on lies. We who have experienced addiction of any kind know the feeling of suddenly realizing we are trapped, caught, enslaved. We can no longer picture life without our addiction. What we usually don’t perceive is that our bondage to evil began one subtle justification or rationalization at a time, one little lie at a time. Nephi clearly understood the connection between believing lies and becoming enslaved:

And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell. And behold, others he flattereth away,

and telleth them there is no hell; and he saith unto them: I am no devil, for there is none—and thus he whispereth in their ears, until he grasps them with his awful chains, from whence there is no deliverance. (2 Nephi 28:21–22)

From Nephi’s chilling warning, we see how subtly we can be bound by chains woven of the lies we hold onto—lies about life, about God, about ourselves and about others. Thus Satan, “the father of lies,” lays the groundwork for our addiction, and in fact, for all sin. Satan doesn’t want us to turn to God and find healing. He wants us to continue to stumble around, looking for happiness in all the wrong places. Thus, sin does not begin with behaviors, but with *beliefs*.

LIES THAT HAVE KEPT ME FROM TURNING TO GOD

President James E. Faust spoke about the importance of having a close, personal relationship with the Lord:

Some time ago in South America, a seasoned group of outstanding missionaries was asked, “What is the greatest need in the world?” One wisely responded, “Is not the greatest need in all of the world for every person to have a personal, ongoing, daily, continuing relationship with Deity?” Having such a relationship can unchain the divinity within us, and nothing can make a greater difference in our lives as we come to know and understand our divine relationship with God and His Beloved Son, our Master. (*Ensign*, Jan. 1999, 2)

As I look back at my relationship with God during my youth and most of my adulthood, I see that most of my interactions with Him—or should I say, my *avoidance* of interaction with Him—was firmly rooted in the negative beliefs Satan had planted in my heart and mind concerning the nature of God. The most powerful way the adversary influenced me to avoid God was to lie to me about who God is and what He is like. Erroneous beliefs about the nature of God served to keep me in my addicted state, afraid to turn to the only true source of help. How

could I have a relationship with a God I feared? It is only in undoing these lies that I have been able to finally come to God and be healed, first from the lies, then from the addiction those lies nurtured.

I have heard it said in Twelve Step circles, “If your picture of God is not helping you get sober, you may have to fire your old God and get a new one.” Said another way, “If your understanding of God is not helping you, you may need to come to a new understanding.” My recovery began when my understanding of God came to coincide more closely with the whole truth about Him—that He is a being of both perfect justice *and* of infinite mercy. The following are some of the *false* ideas about God that kept me running and hiding from Him for years. I am so grateful to be free of them today.

The Distant God

As a scientist, my academic training emphasized the operation of natural laws. At church I was taught that God also obeys and uses natural laws to accomplish His purposes. As I embarked upon the study of science, I enjoyed thinking of God as the greatest of all scientists. This picture of God gave legitimacy to my own choice of profession and I found it personally reassuring to think that life unfolded by rules one could count on.

This “logical” view of God can be taken too far, however. While many of my professors were faithful men who believed in God, some of them subscribed to the idea that God set up the world, then let it go. He didn’t interfere in the daily affairs of men, instead letting them get along the best they could. This is often referred to as the “watchmaker” concept of God—as if the world were a watch God made, set in motion, and then left to run by itself. The idea was that everything we need is already here, and that beyond a few general guidelines—like the Ten Commandments—we don’t need God’s interference or help in our lives. This philosophy gives rise to the lie:

God created the earth, but does not get involved in our personal lives. We are pretty much on our own here in mortality.

The Angry, Vengeful God

Even when I finally began to believe that God might sometimes get involved in our lives, I still wondered just what form that involvement would take. I often agonized: “What does He expect of me, and how upset with me will He be when I fall short?” It was not until I got into recovery that I began to admit how powerfully my assumptions about my Heavenly Father’s character were colored by my earthly father’s attitude toward me. For example, there were occasions when, as a child, I stopped off at this or that friend’s house instead of coming straight home after school as my parents expected me to. When I finally did get home, my mother would express her disappointment with me, but would leave me to wait for my father to come home and discipline me for my offense. Needless to say, I spent those afternoons filled with anxiety and dread of Dad’s arrival and the spanking I would often receive. Somewhere along the way, I began to feel the same way about God as I felt about my father. I was sure that “coming home” to God would also result in being punished. After all, I had certainly been a “bad boy” in my adult indiscretions. Thus, I came to believe this lie:

God is a stern disciplinarian who is angry with me because of my sins and weaknesses.

This seems to be a common belief among those who have become entangled in Satan’s traps. When we sin we naturally suffer the pangs of conscience that sin brings. Then Satan jumps in to exploit and exaggerate our fears and tell us lies about God that keep us from turning to Him for help. I think of Alma the Younger and how he dreaded coming into the presence of God because of the memory of his sins:

The very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds. (Alma 36:14–15)

What a trap Satan has constructed for keeping us in sin! First he entices us to commit the sin. Then he slams us with the greatest lie he

can tell: That our only possible helper—the Lord—is an ogre! If we believe that, then Satan really has us, for he has cut us off from our only source of redemption.

I am sure the adversary is 100% responsible for this distorted picture of an angry God who delights in wrath. This concept has been handed down for centuries, even within our Christian culture. For example, I remember a sermon written by a Puritan preacher, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), which I was required to read in high school, entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment.

Having already developed a number of faults, including a chronic problem with sexual self-gratification, I was understandably unsettled by that terrible description, and was very grateful that I belonged to a church that taught that God was merciful and kind. For some reason though, I was still persuaded by Satan’s lie that while God might be merciful and kind *to others*, when it came to me and my sins He felt more like the God Jonathan Edwards described. I was convinced that if God was not outright angry with me, He was at least very disappointed and probably outright disgusted. As a result, I avoided any consistent personal effort to approach God. I was sure I would only be met with rebuke. I once saw a bumper sticker that said: “Jesus is coming—and boy is He ticked!” I laughed, but inside I cringed. I was afraid that at least where His feelings toward me were concerned, that bumper sticker wasn’t far off the mark.

Under the influence of this lie, even my reading of the scriptures was twisted and confused. It seemed I couldn't open them without finding a verse that portrayed God as angry and fearsome:

Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord. Also in Horeb ye provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry with you to have destroyed you. (Deuteronomy 9:7–8)

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:5–6)

And [the wicked] said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (Revelation 6:16–17)

Verses like these totally eclipsed in my guilt-ridden mind the far more frequent verses that testify of God's goodness, patience, and long-suffering nature.

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

After years of avoiding this indifferent or disgusted God I had imagined, and hiding in the den of addiction, I finally reached a point where, as Alma described, I too was racked with the torment of a damned soul. And like Alma, though I was afraid to face God, I finally accepted the truth that I had to turn to Him and seek the Savior's direct intervention in my behalf if I was to ever find relief:

And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: *O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.* And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. (Alma 36:17–19, emphasis added)

Like Alma, I had finally become desperate enough to reach out to the Lord. Even though I was not sure what would happen to me, I knew that anything He might do could not possibly be worse than the slow soul-rot of my addiction. I had to have help! My own strength was failing me miserably. Somehow I, too, came to understand that Jesus was the only One who could save me. Trembling, but resolute, I confessed to Him my utter helplessness and my total dependence on Him. To my great astonishment and relief, He did not reject me as I feared. Instead, He welcomed me with open arms. The lies I had believed immediately began to fall away and I saw Him with new eyes. He was indeed a God of love and tenderness!

As I studied the scriptures with this new heart, softened toward God, I began to realize the phrase “the wrath of God” can be viewed differently than I had ever seen it before. I think of that phrase now, not as a description of His feelings toward us, but as the inevitable consequences of disobeying the eternal principles God Himself lives and is trying to teach us through the commandments He gives us:

Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy

could have claim on them no more forever. (Mosiah 3:26, emphasis added)

I was amazed at this new perspective! My heart was even more tender toward God when I realized that He had no choice but to allow Adam to experience the Fall as a consequence of his eating the forbidden fruit! I had always thought of God as “all-powerful,” and I still believe He most certainly does have all the power it is possible for any being to retain in righteousness. Today, though, I believe that because of His strict obedience to eternal laws, including the interplay of agency, justice, and mercy, there are some things God cannot do. He cannot save us in our sins. He cannot bless us for keeping commandments we have not kept. These are just other ways of saying He cannot “lie” or pretend that something is true that isn’t, for He is a God of truth in all things. In a similar way, He cannot keep us from the consequences of our sins if we refuse to repent (**Helaman 3:29, D&C 19:16–17**).

Today I realize my old images of God were not consistent with the teachings of the Book of Mormon. God is not indifferent to my life. He is very much involved in all our lives, but He must respect the same eternal principles He requires us to respect. God is bound by eternal laws, laws which God Himself must obey or He would cease to be God (**2 Nephi 2:13**). Justice demands payment for laws that are broken. Jesus was willing to suffer *for* us, so we ourselves would not have to suffer the penalty required by justice. But that substitution of His suffering for ours is only possible if we turn to Him and consciously and deliberately accept His gift. If we refuse to do so, God cannot interfere with the eternal law of justice, which demands the automatic implementation of the penalty. Our repentance, coupled with Jesus’ willingness to meet the demands of justice is the only way mercy can *satisfy* justice without *robbing* or negating it (**Alma 42:14–26**).

Thus, since God is the embodiment of these principles, He becomes a representation of them, and the punishment exacted by these laws is expressed as the “wrath of God.” This expression does not mean that He is *personally* angry with us or that He *personally* has to execute the punishments. His reaction is rather one of sorrow at our disobedience—not because He needs our obedience, but because of the sorrow and

suffering we bring upon ourselves when we disobey. Like any loving parent, He suffers *with us*:

And it came to pass that the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains? And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity? (Moses 7:28–29)

And God explained to Enoch:

Unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood;...and among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren...Satan shall be their father, and misery shall be their doom; and the whole heavens shall weep over them, even all the workmanship of mine hands; *wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer?* (Moses 7:33, 36–37; emphasis added)

Notice the heavens weep when we sin because sinning causes *us* to suffer. And as Enoch began to share God's perspective, he too, wept:

And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Enoch, and told Enoch all the doings of the children of men; wherefore Enoch knew, and looked upon their wickedness, and their misery, and wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook...And as Enoch saw [those who would be destroyed in the flood], he had bitterness of soul, and wept over his brethren, and said unto the heavens: I will refuse to be comforted; but the Lord said unto Enoch: Lift up your

heart, and be glad; and look...And behold, Enoch saw the day of the coming of the Son of Man, even in the flesh; and his soul rejoiced. (Moses 7:41, 44, 47)

All sorrows can be erased in the Atonement of our Beloved Savior, if we will but repent. It all depends on our willingness to come to Him. This new perspective not only colors the way I hear the scriptures, it also colors my prayers, and opens to my understanding a new relationship with my Savior. Like Alma, I no longer fear Him but instead rejoice in His reality in my life. I never knew it was possible to love anyone the way I love Jesus and the way I now understand He loves me and has always loved me. With Alma, I no longer fear the coming of the Lord, but rejoice in it and long for that great day to come. Alma testified:

And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice. (Alma 13:25)

What an amazing change of heart Alma had experienced! He had come to know and trust the goodness of God, which enabled him to repent and be reborn. I am humbled to be able to add my testimony to his that such changes are possible. A life out of tune can be put right again. A soul tortured with guilt can once more know peace. The Savior only waits for our decision to come unto Him.

FINDING HEALING IN UNDERSTANDING GOD AS JOSEPH SMITH KNEW HIM

And so it was that, just as the old Twelve Step adage said, I had to “fire” my old beliefs about God and “hire” some new ones. To put it more literally, I had to finally make the effort to come to *know* the Lord as He is revealed in the fullness of the restored gospel. I had to admit that all my church activity and “busyness” in the service of others over my lifetime had not amounted to coming to *know* Him (**Matthew 7:23**).

As I studied more deeply and sincerely, I was led to the *Lectures on Faith*. There I “joined” the School of the Prophets, as the Prophet Joseph revealed several things about the true character of God.

First, that He was God before the world was created, and the same God that He was after it was created.

Secondly, that He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and that He was so from everlasting and will be to everlasting.

Thirdly, that He changes not, neither is there variable-ness with Him; but that He is the same from everlasting to everlasting, being the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that His course is one eternal round, without variation.

Fourthly, that He is a God of truth and cannot lie.

Fifthly, that He is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of Him.

Sixthly, that He is love. (*Lectures on Faith*, 35)

Prayerfully, I sought to understand how knowing these characteristics of God could help me in overcoming my addiction. Let me share some insights I feel He gave me:

1. *God was God before the world was made, and he is the same God today.* He knows what is going on. You might say, He has been around the proverbial “block” a few times. He totally understands not only the way the *worlds* work, but also the way *people* work. In other words, he knows the principles of happiness just as well as the principles of astronomy and physics. When God gives us a commandment, He isn’t doing it arbitrarily. He’s actually trying to share with us what works to bring lasting satisfaction and joy in life. After all, He’s the expert. He’s seen it before. He has lived it Himself. I began to realize that if I would trust these true principles, I could be led by a *perfected*

human who has experienced a thousand times more than I will ever be required to endure in mortality.

2. *God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness.* This means He wants to help me. He is not sitting on the judgment throne waiting for a chance to condemn me, as I had previously thought. Instead, He wants to do all that He can to redeem me from the suffering I have thus far brought upon myself. As I accepted these truths, I began to realize I can trust that if I go to Him, I will find help, not criticism or condemnation. The Prophet Joseph wrote:

Unless He was merciful and gracious, slow to anger, long-suffering and full of goodness, such is the weakness of human nature, and so great the frailties and imperfections of men, that unless they believed that these excellencies existed in the divine character, the faith necessary to salvation could not exist; for doubt would take the place of faith, *and those who know their weakness and liability to sin would be in constant doubt of salvation if it were not for the idea which they have of the excellency of the character of God, that He is slow to anger and long-suffering, and of a forgiving disposition, and does forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin.* An idea of these facts does away with doubt, and makes faith exceedingly strong. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 35–36, emphasis added)

If you weren't really impressed by that paragraph, you might want to read it again. Read it as if Joseph were talking, one-on-one and heart-to-heart with us addicts. He is saying that we need to know God is loving so we can trust Him and take our addictive behaviors to Him. From my own experiences I can testify that the Lord does welcome us home and does not condemn us.

3. *The nature of God does not change.* This means I can *always* trust Him. He is not going to be good to me one day and cruel the next. We need to be told this because we don't see that same steadiness in the people around us. None of us in

mortality is perfectly consistent, but as hard as it may be to imagine, God *is*. Sometimes we excuse ourselves when we are irritable or uncooperative by saying we are “having a bad day.” God never has “bad days.”

4. *God cannot lie.*

All the promises God has made to me will be fulfilled. I can count on Him. I may have been let down and disappointed by others in my life, but God will not let me down. It may take time for us to fully believe this, but we need to give Him the chance to prove it to us.

5. *He is no respecter of persons.*

If He has helped *any* other person recover from addiction or any other challenge, He will also help me. God’s promises don’t just apply to others; they apply to *all* of us, without exception!

6. *God is love.*

The characteristic of love so permeates the nature of God that it can be said of Him that He *is* love. Every action He takes toward us is based in love. I can trust that whatever His response to my petitions to Him, *it will be loving and benevolent.*

When I started to gain a more accurate understanding of the true nature of the Savior as “the Eternal God” (title page of the Book of Mormon), I started to let go of my fear of Him. I started to gain hope and confidence that motivated me to come to Him for help. As I came to Him, I found that He reciprocated! I felt Him draw near to me, as he has promised:

**Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you;
seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye
shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
(D&C 88:63)**

What joy I experienced when I found that promise applied to me—to sinful, slothful, weak, backsliding, unhappy me! What a miracle! What a revelation!

As I approached the Lord and felt Him welcome me, I began to feel I knew Him, not just as a concept or a historical figure, but as a Person,

as a Man—the most glorious and exalted Man I have ever known in this life. I began to get a sense of His personality, His goodness, His kindness and patience. As I reflected on this “new-found” relationship, I began to realize that it was really one of the longest standing relationships I have. Suddenly the gospel teaching that Jesus was my older brother since I first came into being as a spirit child of our Heavenly Father was more than just a pretty story to me. I *knew* it was true! He has known me and been my example, my teacher and my friend for eons. The recovery of this “memory,” of this sure witness, has been the central meaning of the word “recovery” for me as I’ve continued to work my program. I find myself continuing to recover from my addiction in direct proportion to how much of my former relationship with the Lord I allow myself to believe and receive. In the course of this recovery process I have come to know that He still loves me, despite my sins. I know that although He abhors my *sins*, He still loves and accepts *me*.

As this very personal testimony of Christ’s love for me began to enlighten my mind and heart, I saw that none of the angry, impatient sentiments I had felt toward myself all these years had come from Him. They were a fabrication, woven of my own shame and the lies I had believed about how God felt about me, lies whispered to me by the enemy of my soul.

AWAKENING TO THE LOVE OF GOD

As I have come to know the goodness of God and to believe I could be a recipient of this goodness, I have started to rejoice in the scriptures that tell me of His true, tender and loving nature. I now identify with the prophets who have written of Him, because I now know the same God they knew. Their testimony resonates in my soul in a way it never did before. Let me share some favorite passages with you:

And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of

men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul. (1 Nephi 11:21–23)

Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ. (Alma 5:38)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Matthew 23:37)

The Lord repeated the same lament to those who survived the destruction at the time of His death (3 Nephi 10:4–6), saying how readily He would have gathered those who had fallen if they had come unto Him. He has renewed that promise in our own day:

For, behold, I will gather them as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, if they will not harden their hearts; Yea, if they will come, they may, and partake of the waters of life freely. (D&C 10:65–66)

The scriptures are also full of the promise the Lord makes to us, that if we will repent, He will forgive us and help us out of the bondage to which we have subjected ourselves. In these scriptures I again see the loving nature of God and the hope for healing and forgiveness:

In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment [I let you experience the consequences of your own actions]; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:8)

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. (Hosea 13:9)

Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me. (Mosiah 26:30)

I am so grateful for this understanding of the true nature of God that has been given us through the revelations of the restoration. While these truths have been restored to us *as a people*, we must each allow them to be restored to us *individually* and to take effect in our own hearts and lives. In this restored understanding, let us come unto Christ and not be afraid of Him.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

It is hard to describe the difference it makes to have this reawakened relationship with my Savior. Some have described having the Spirit in their lives as walking in the light compared to walking in shadows. To me it is a feeling of peace instead of a feeling of fear. Fear is a natural consequence of sin, and I think the adversary takes great delight in playing upon this fear. The Lord, on the other hand, desires for us to have peace.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

Peace comes into our lives as we come to know Christ's goodness and mercy. It comes as we understand that while mercy cannot rob justice, it can *satisfy* justice. An even deeper peace settles upon our hearts when we come to know the Lord Himself, and realize that He knows us and either will, or already has, forgiven us for our sins as we continue to repent. If we trust Him and continue to come to Him, He will help us with each and every step of our mortal journey. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

When we begin to learn this way, we begin to learn the only true God, and what kind of a being we have got to worship. Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach Him, and how to ask so as to receive an

answer. When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 349–350)

What a glorious promise! If we only knew what amazing blessings were in store for us, none of us would hold back. We would all rush quickly into His arms!

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER

Capturing is one of the most helpful practices I have found for making the scriptures and other written materials come alive for me. This tool has been of immeasurable value in helping me come to know myself and the Savior. I recommend it to each of you with all my heart. I am sure you will find it of great benefit, not only while working through this book, but for the rest of your life.

ASSIGNMENT: Before continuing, please turn to Appendix A and read the section called “Capturing” starting on page 251.

For years I had heard the counsel that I should keep a journal. I made a few feeble attempts at journal writing through the years, but I didn’t really catch the vision until I started working on a serious recovery program. I found that writing was not just for the purpose of keeping a record. As I wrote about my recovery experiences and feelings, I began to see things I had not previously been able or willing to see. As I wrote about things I was reading in the scriptures, I was amazed and delighted to see what new insights were opened to me. Above all, I came to understand that the Lord was mindful of me. He was willing to counsel with me personally as I used the tool of writing to slow down my thoughts and listen for His thoughts and impressions. Recently, I became aware of Elder Richard G. Scott’s testimony of the appropriateness of writing down our personal revelation:

The Savior said, ‘I will tell you in your *mind* and in your *heart*, by the Holy Ghost’ (D&C 8:2, emphasis added)... An impression to the *mind* is very specific. Detailed words can be heard or felt and written as though the instruction were being dictated. (“*Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led*,” Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Symposium, August 11, 1998, Brigham Young University, 2, emphasis added)

It is my testimony that He will do the same for you, and that writing will be a vehicle for receiving much guidance and healing. This is true even if you haven’t written much before. It will work even if you don’t like writing. I strongly encourage you to try. It will bring you great rewards. *Please take the time to write about these questions; the process of writing will make a big difference in how much you gain from this book.*

We behave as we believe, and in order to change our actions, we need to change some of our beliefs. In order to see which beliefs may be holding us back, we need to know what our beliefs are. The following questions will help you examine your beliefs. You may want to write about one each day for the next five days.

1. Joseph Smith said, “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 345). What has your concept of God been until now? Write about three men you know who have some characteristics that seem to you to be like God’s.
2. Alma wrote that at death, **“The spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life” (Alma 40:11)**. Write about why a loving Father would want to visit with all His children, even the wayward ones. What might He want to say to them before they go to their assigned place in the spirit world? How do you picture Him expressing His love for them?
3. A proverb in Ezekiel’s time said, **“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezekiel 18:2)**.

We may have acquired beliefs about God, from our parents or others, that either hinder us or help us in coming to Him. Write about where you think most of your *feelings* about God (not just facts) came from. How appropriate do you think they are now?

4. Describe in writing how you feel about your relationship with the Lord, and about your hopes for your future relationship with Him.
5. The quote from Joseph Smith cited in question 1 continues: “And to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.” Prayerfully ponder and write about what you imagine your conversation with the Lord would be if you could have a private priesthood interview with Him.

Chapter

3

*Undoing the Lies
About Us*

When the prophets tell us we need “clean hands,” they mean, of course, in the spiritual sense, but a comparison with the physical can help us understand the spiritual. For example, suppose you have been working on your car’s engine. Your hands are really grimy with ground-in oil and dirt. You wash with soap and water, but that’s not enough. What do you do? You use a stronger cleaner, maybe a solvent. You’d never consider cutting your hands off because they’re dirty. After all, it’s only the dirt that’s undesirable. Underneath the dirt, you know you still have a really good pair of hands, even if it takes strong measures to get them clean. So it is with our spiritual “hands,” our spiritual selves. God doesn’t want to cut *us* off, he wants to make us clean again.

Differentiating between who we are (our hands) and what we have done (the dirt on our hands) is an important step in learning to see the truth about ourselves. How *we* see *ourselves* is an integral part of everything we do. The way we behave is strongly influenced by the picture we have of ourselves. That is why the adversary conducts such a vicious campaign against our self-image. One avenue of attack comes through the messages from our society. Sexual transgression has been part of every age, and the times we live in are particularly permissive. Even so, there still exists a definite disdain or contempt for those who let their sexual urges get out of hand. Those of us who have been caught in these out-of-control sexual behaviors have felt this contempt. We have even joined in our own condemnation, shaming and blaming ourselves more

than anyone else could. This shame leads us to isolate ourselves from others, from society, and especially from God, thus cutting ourselves off from all sources of help and healing.

THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR BASIC CHARACTER

In the process of becoming trapped in addiction, we believe and accept a number of lies which make our enslavement possible. Recovery can be defined as a process of recognizing these lies and replacing them with truth. The sweet joy recovery brings comes from being reunited with the truth about God's character (as we covered in the last chapter) and also from reawakening to a knowledge of our own true character.

Joseph Smith taught a powerful lesson about understanding God and ourselves:

There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God...If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 343)

If men do not comprehend God's character, they do not comprehend their own! Why would Joseph say that? I believe he was trying to tell us that we are—in our truest and deepest selves—more like our Heavenly Father than we can even imagine. It is not just symbolic or poetic language to call us children of God. As the apostle Paul said, **“We are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28)**. We are of the same family—the same species, the same race. We are the same kind of being. We are not just His creations, His puppets or His creatures. We are His *children*. Just as our physical bodies reflect characteristics of our earthly parents, our spirits have inherited many traits of our heavenly parents. Our Father and Mother in Heaven are immortal human beings, and although they are much farther along in their eternal progression, there are still many ways we are more *like* them than we are *different* from them. I imagine that those among us who have progressed the farthest, in their best moments are not very different in character from God. I believe that God has many of the same feelings, sentiments, and instincts we do.

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus, our great High Priest, understands us far better than we understand ourselves. He remembers us as we once were, before the fall. He believes in us, even when we don't believe in ourselves. He believes in us, *even when we don't believe in Him.*

Paul talked about our relationship to God, and how we become more and more like our Father as we grow spiritually:

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:6–7)

The title "Abba" is an interesting one. In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Abba is not the formal term for "Father." Rather, it is the type of endearing term a small child might use, such as "Papa" or "Daddy" (Hugh Nibley, *BYU Studies*, vol. 19, 50). Jesus also used this term in the Lord's Prayer, which, if we heard it as He spoke it, might sound something like "Our Daddy, who art in heaven." The tenderness of this sweet relationship that the Spirit tells me I enjoyed with my "Daddy" in Heaven before my birth into mortality melts my heart and brings tears to my eyes.

SATAN TWISTS THE GIFT OF CONSCIENCE

One mission of both the Holy Ghost and the Light of Christ is to testify to us of the truth, even when the truth is that we have done something wrong. This is the gift of conscience. Sometimes, instead of taking courage in the promise of forgiveness for repentance, we allow Satan to twist this gift of conscience, using it to keep us in sin rather than to turn us back to God. Responding to the urging of the adversary, we give in to blame and shame. We take those thoughts of correction

and run with them down the field in the wrong direction—toward our opponent’s goal. We turn the Lord’s invitation to repent into a reason to demoralize ourselves and set ourselves up to be even more vulnerable to sin.

Thus, Satan uses the enticings of our own conscience to defeat us. Unlike the Lord, he doesn’t respect us and is totally devoid of integrity. He doesn’t fight fair. He entices us to sin, saying “Hey, this will be fun, this will be great—come and try this out! It’s not that bad. It won’t do any harm.” Then when we give in, he turns on us and sneers in our face, in a cruel, sadistic imitation of our conscience: “You sinner! You scum! You are the biggest slimeball in history. No one could possibly tolerate you (let alone love you) if they knew what you are *really* like.” On and on it goes. Is it any wonder the adversary is referred to as **“the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:10)**. The really sad part is that after a while, we take up the cry ourselves, becoming our own accusers. Our enemy has convinced us to join his side *against ourselves*, exactly as he intended. He knows if he can confuse our perception of our conscience enough, if he can get us to *identify ourselves* as sinners, we are that much easier to coax into sin. We act as we believe, and if we believe ourselves to be bad, we are much more likely to act badly. We say to ourselves: “Why shouldn’t I do (whatever)? That’s just the sort of person I am. There’s no point in expecting anything better from me.” Thus our negative beliefs contribute to our own defeat. As the scriptures tell us, **“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7)**.

When the Light of Christ, one function of which is our conscience, speaks to our hearts, we must learn to react in a balanced way. We cannot take our sins too lightly, minimizing their severity and short-changing our repentance. On the other hand, we must not be demoralized over our mistakes. We need to take courage and move forward, realizing the Lord has confidence in us, and that correction from Him is truly an evidence of His love:

**My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,
nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the
Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son
whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God**

dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?...but he [chasteneth us] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:5–7, 10–11)

Not only is the Lord's correction done with love, but it arises from His desire to bring us peace, righteousness, and exaltation. While it is never a comfortable feeling to have our conscience witness to us that we have made a mistake and therefore need to repent, the corrections we receive are a reminder of the Lord's confidence in us and His invitation to us to become something better. Elder Neal A. Maxwell cautions:

What can we do to manage these vexing feelings of inadequacy?...We can distinguish more clearly between divine discontent and the devil's dissonance, between dissatisfaction with self and disdain for self. We need the first and must shun the second, remembering that when conscience calls to us from the next ridge, it is not solely to scold but also to beckon. (*Ensign*, November 1976, 14)

ASSAILED BY LIES

If I am truly the son of a divine, loving Father in Heaven, how did I come to see myself so negatively? How did I become convinced of the worst about myself? The apostle Paul gave us at least part of the answer:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

We are not alone on this earth. Nor are all those who share this earth with us friendly. Satan and his followers have determined to destroy us, and they will continue that campaign until they are finally

bound and stopped. In the meantime, we have a battle on our hands. Even so, we should always keep in mind, as the Prophet Joseph put it:

All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. The devil has no power over us only as we permit him. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 181)

As long as we resist the adversary, the only power he has is to lie to us. Yet this is still a formidable power. Lies are the basis of all the evil in the world. Every person who indulges in sin has accepted the lie that happiness can be found in sin.

Satan is also leading a major campaign to rob us of our knowledge of God. One of the most damaging lies Satan has perpetrated is that we cannot know our Heavenly Father. Some churches have been deceived into accepting this lie, teaching that God is “unknowable.” This lie robs us of the knowledge of our kinship with God, isolating us and making us easier to deceive and enslave.

In the midst of addiction, I wandered in a fog of lies—lies I believed, as well as lies I told. Before I could get free from addiction, I needed to become free from these damaging falsehoods that I both believed and acted upon. One of the most detrimental lies was this:

I am fundamentally a bad person because of my sins and my addiction. The fact that all my attempts at repentance have not freed me from these despicable behaviors must mean that my basic nature is really evil.

If you have never experienced firsthand the devastation of addiction, you may think this statement is an exaggeration. If you have struggled as I have, however, I think you will recognize these feelings. Sometimes I was so consumed with guilt that it was hard for me to see *anything* good about myself. It is one thing to feel remorse for a particular behavior, but I went in for wholesale condemnation. Today I realize that these self-judging thoughts didn’t come entirely from myself. The forces of evil are continually at work, striving to tear down every positive feeling we have toward ourselves.

THE LIE OF LABELING

Years ago I saw the movie “Dr. Zhivago.” I was struck by a scene where a middle-aged man was deviously carrying out an attack on a young woman’s basic character by saying: “There are two kinds of women in the world—and we both know which kind you are.” By trying to get the girl to define herself in a negative way, he hoped to convince her to behave according to that definition. Satan used the same sort of manipulation on me, and for many years, I believed his lies. “There are good men and there are those who give in to temptation. There are men who are above it all, and there are men who slip and fall. We both know which kind of man you are.” And so I came to believe another lie:

There are men who have never made mistakes anything like the mistakes I have made. They are practically perfect. I am fundamentally different from them and always will be. I am made of lesser stuff.

I have often looked at the prophets and other General Authorities, even my bishops and stake presidents, and thought what wonderfully spiritual men they are. I said to myself, “Surely these men have never been tempted by the sins I have participated in. They would never understand me or my challenges.” I thought these men were not only *better* than I was, but a better *kind* of man than I was. This sort of thinking kept me from seeking the friendship of those whom I considered to be truly good men, thinking “They wouldn’t want to be around someone like me.” I thought of these good men of the Church being like the priesthood holders Alma described, as **“pure and spotless before God, [who] could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence” (Alma 13:12)**. These men were certainly on a higher plane than I was. They didn’t even seem to have the same reaction to temptation that I did. In other words, sin wasn’t even appealing to them.

Well, I knew that surely wasn’t me. I didn’t look upon sin with abhorrence. I looked upon sin, first with curiosity, then with tolerance, then eventually with longing. I lived out Alexander Pope’s poem:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;

Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
 We first endure, then pity, then embrace.
 (Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*. Epistle ii. Line 217)

I didn't start out with this blatant acceptance of sin. There was a time, years and years ago, when I was repulsed by the world of sin which pornography represented. But years of toying with temptation eventually brought me to believe that sexual indulgence could be my cure-all. I used sex to comfort my feelings of uneasiness. Nevertheless, each time I acted on the temptation, the knowledge that I had been deceived, *yet again*, pierced my heart with inevitable clarity. Sin promised relief but only delivered sorrow and despair. I came to hate the *consequences* of sin, but unfortunately, this wasn't the "abhorrence" Alma spoke of. As I became increasingly trapped, it wasn't so much the sin I looked upon with abhorrence, it was me! Although I suffered the pain of having sinned, after a while the pain would lessen and I would again become enticed, entranced by the lures of lust. I was so weak and so different from these good men described by Alma, I felt I must have been born without some critical element which they had in abundance. What I lacked was the ability to find sin abhorrent *before* I sinned, not *after*!

SEEING THE SCRIPTURES WITH NEW EYES

Just as I shared in Chapter Two that the lies I believed about God affected my ability to interpret the scriptures, so had the lies I believed about myself. For example, because I believed the lie that I was an inferior sort of person, I was blinded to an important lesson taught in the passage from **Alma 13** referred to above. One day, after I started working a Twelve Step program, I read this passage again and saw things I hadn't noticed before. As my brain cleared and my spiritual eyes opened, I saw that these wonderful, righteous brethren, described in the scriptures, *hadn't always been like that*. They had needed repentance too. Alma recorded:

There were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance...choosing to repent

and work righteousness rather than to perish. (Alma 13:10; emphasis added)

These men, who were so righteous they could not look upon sin except with abhorrence, *were once guilty of sins that put them in danger of perishing!*

As I read further, I realized these verses told a story of purification, not perfection. These men were not simply *born* pure, but rather, through their repentance and the Lord's sanctifying influence in their lives, they *became* pure:

Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

Now they, *after* being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments *made* white, being [*after* their repentance] pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were *made* pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:11–12, emphasis added)

Alma was describing the *process* of repentance these men had gone through, and the miracle of their having been made pure and clean by the Savior through the ministering of the Holy Ghost. And then this wonderful invitation in the next verse:

And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. (Alma 13:13, emphasis added)

This time I read these words with real understanding. What hope and encouragement they contained! *I* could be made clean and become sanctified, or holy, and enter into this same rest. *I wasn't* a different *kind* of person, after all. I had the same potential as these righteous brethren, whom I had respected all these years. If I chose to repent, I could have the same blessings they received. What a liberating thought! What

freedom! What love and goodness our Lord extends to all of His children, even to me! No one is ever excluded from the promises of God.

THE SAVIOR'S INVITATION TO US ALL

As I began to turn away from the lies I had believed, and started accepting the truths the Lord was revealing to me about myself, I saw how deceived I had been to think there was anyone the Savior didn't love enough to die for—including me! After all, I knew men and women right here on earth who made a genuine (and usually successful) attempt to be sympathetic and gracious toward everyone. If they could do that as well as they did, why did I ever imagine that God, the greatest of all, couldn't and wouldn't feel even more kindhearted and patient?

While it is true, according to the scriptures, that at some future time, commonly referred to as “the end of the world,” the Savior will take up His role as the judge of mankind, that time has not yet arrived. In the Gospel of John, which is often referred to as “the gospel of love,” we read this statement by Jesus to his disciples: **“I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47)**. I believe with all my heart that this is still a true description of the Savior's mission. He is still pleading with us to repent, hoping to save us rather than to judge us. Someone once said that when the time finally comes that the Savior must put on the robes of judgment, it will be with tears streaming down His face. I believe that. I think it is impossible for us to fully comprehend the depth of His compassion for us, even in our sins. Consider the story of the woman taken in adultery:

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:10–11)

How kind, how loving was our Savior's response to this woman. Can you imagine a more gentle way than this to counsel someone who had committed the sin that has been called **“most abominable above all**

sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost” (Alma 39:5)? The kindness of His reply is profoundly moving to me. It touches me even more to realize that this is the *same* Savior who watches over *me* today. His nature has not changed, and His disposition toward me is no different from His disposition toward this unfortunate woman. He does not minimize the importance of repentance and keeping the commandments, but *He respects the person He corrects*.

On the other hand, we must not assume that because of God’s great love for us, He will or even *could* save us in our sins (Alma 11:37). We must not rationalize or minimize our poor choices. We must realize that unless we repent, our sins will bring terrible heartache and pain to ourselves and to others. Why? Because “**wickedness never was [nor ever will be] happiness**” (Alma 41:10). It might bring numbness for awhile, or maybe distraction, but it can never bring us genuine happiness or joy. *That’s a fact, not a judgment*. As we learned in Chapter Two, even God has to live by such eternal truths.

SEEING OURSELVES AS GOD SEES US: WITH MERCY, HOPE AND LOVE

Psychologists tell us a child does not have the ability to see himself except in the “mirror” others hold up to him. Parents, of course, have a tremendous influence on their children. If the parents express confidence in the child, the child develops confidence in himself. If the parents are critical and demeaning, the child sees himself as deserving criticism and becomes hesitant and insecure. If the parents are forgiving, the child learns he can try new things, even risking mistakes. On the other hand, if the parents are quick to condemn mistakes, the child will fear attempting new things. In time, a parent’s disapproval of a child becomes the child’s own disapproval of himself.

How do any of us mortals, with our limited view of ourselves, come to know who we *really* are? How do we come to accurately assess our own behavior, to trust that we see ourselves correctly? The apostle Paul said:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:11–12)

What a revelation it would be to know ourselves as God knows us. We might be surprised. I certainly was.

As I let go of the lies Satan told me and began to listen to the truth as it was spoken to my heart by the Spirit of the Lord, I found a great sense of joy and even relief. As I continue to trust the Lord, actively seeking and accepting His guidance in my life, I hear His voice reassuring me of His great love for me. We are told **“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy [or revelation]” (Revelation 19:10)**. Perhaps the most important “testimony of Jesus” we need to receive is *His* testimony concerning *us* and our worth to Him.

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER

Please take time to answer the following questions in your recovery journal.

1. At this point in your life, how do you see yourself? Get a piece of paper and as fast as you can, fire off a list of adjectives describing yourself. Try to include at least ten—twenty, if you can. (Do this now, before reading the rest of the question.) Now, number them, beginning with the ones that ring the truest to you. What source—negative (the adversary) or positive (the Lord)—do you feel or sense has prompted each of the descriptions on your list?
2. Have you ever felt you were “more powerful to mess up than God is to heal?” Does God think of you differently than He does His other children? Write about how you feel regarding your personal chances for forgiveness.

3. Read of the Savior's kindness toward the woman taken in adultery (**John 8:1–11**). Suppose you were "caught in the act" of practicing your addiction and were taken to Jesus. How would you feel? What do you imagine He would say to you? Can you imagine Him speaking to you as gently as He spoke to this woman? Write some gentle words you feel He might speak to you.

4. Who is the most Christlike person you know? (Pick someone you know well.) Does this person know about your addiction? If yes, how did he or she respond to you when they learned about it? If this person doesn't know yet, how do you imagine they would respond if you told them? Write about what they said or what you can picture them saying to you.

5. If someone came to you and told you they were struggling as you have struggled, would you condemn them? Write a response you might share with this person. Next write about how you have treated yourself. Do you deserve to be treated any worse than you would treat someone else with your problem?

Chapter 4

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over compulsive addictive behaviors—that our lives had become unmanageable.

(Heart t' Heart traditional version, adapted from A.A.)

Admitted that we of ourselves are powerless, nothing without God. (Mosiah 4:5; Alma 26:12)

(Heart t' Heart scriptural version)

How do I interpret Step One for myself? How do I apply it to my own life? The painful tutoring of my own experience has taught me I am powerless over sexual addiction. I cannot quit by myself. I cannot abstain from sexual actions or thoughts without the intervention and grace of Christ. I simply don't have the power to do it. All I can bring to the problem is my willingness to be helped, to be cleansed from the addiction by a Power greater than my own.

PERFECTIONISM, POWERLESSNESS AND ME

From my earliest years I had an intense concern with doing things right. I wanted to make others happy with me and not disappoint them. The specter of failure loomed large, and I feared it immensely. Being called a "failure" was one of the most devastating insults I knew. In short, I was a perfectionist. I used to think it was ludicrous to call myself

that because I consistently fell short in so many areas. I have since learned that perfectionism is not the same thing as *doing* everything correctly, it is the *obsession* with doing everything correctly. It is not the admirable virtue I used to think, but rather a debilitating frame of mind that constantly drained me of motivation.

When I became entangled in sinful sexual behaviors, my inability to free myself presented a near death blow to my self-esteem. Nevertheless, I still hoped that maybe somewhere inside I had the power to succeed—if I could only find it. The idea that I might be powerless over this behavior was too hard for me to accept. Stubbornly, I continued to struggle, sure that my own strength would eventually prove sufficient. The thought that I might *not* have the power to master my weaknesses was repulsive to me. Thoughts like, “Be a man, not a weakling,” and “You can do anything you put your mind to” kept going through my head. I had attended a number of classes on motivation, on being my best self, on overcoming my self-defeating behaviors. I knew if I just found the right approach to this problem, it would yield to “the invincible power of the human spirit” in me. Hadn’t all these men I read about overcome *their* challenges and gone on to become great, self-sufficient, even wealthy? Surely I could at least overcome this one bad habit!

These thoughts of “You can do it!” were so comforting, so encouraging, so enticing, so *seductive* to my ego (my pride) that I kept on trying to overcome not just my sexual problems on my own, but all my other problems as well—procrastination, being habitually late, starting projects and not finishing them, even my perpetually disorganized way of living. I was sure I could conquer all these weaknesses if I just read the right book, took the right class, or found the right inspirational person to follow and to emulate.

MY “UNCONQUERABLE” SOUL

Puffed up on all this learning of men, I had great confidence that all my challenges and limitations would soon yield to the “positive mental attitude” I was always just *about* to acquire. Sentiments like these, expressed in the poem “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley, inspired me:

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody, but unbowed...

It matters not how strait the gate,
 How charged with punishments the scroll,
 I am the master of my fate:
 I am the captain of my soul.

(Best Loved Poems of the American People, Hazel Felleman)

Irrationally, I took comfort in thinking of myself as “the master of my fate,” and “the captain of my soul,” even though my helplessness over sexual actions continually proved otherwise. Convinced that my eventual success or failure was entirely in my hands, I increased my efforts to overcome all my problems, including my growing sexual indulgence, through my own insufficient strength. I was determined to win by sheer persistence.

When I was in graduate school, I ran across another quote that affected me strongly. I couldn’t decide, however, whether I was more encouraged or discouraged by it. On the one hand, it was very inspiring, but on the other hand, it was also faintly disturbing:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
 Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. (Calvin Coolidge)

What was it about this thought that bothered me? After all, it was touting persistence, the very quality I clung to as my one last hope for freedom from my sin. Still, I couldn’t find any reassurance in President

Coolidge's words. Why? After considerable reflection, I recognized an old familiar threat in this quote: *the threat of failure*. It rang too close to what I had heard all my life: "Philip, you could do so much better if you would just apply yourself and live up to your potential!" So instead of inspiring me to more consistent effort, as I am sure Coolidge intended, his words seemed to condemn me to a fate I already feared: "It doesn't matter if you *do* have talent. You are going to fail anyway, because you can't be persistent enough!"

In my desperation to believe in myself, I turned a blind eye to certain scriptures that suggested more humility was in order. Verses like these troubled me:

O how great is the *nothingness* of the children of men; yea, even they are *less than the dust of the earth*. (Helaman 12:7, emphasis added)

I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, *and your own nothingness*, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, *unworthy creatures*, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility. (Mosiah 4:11, emphasis added)

Yea, I know that *I am nothing*; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself. (Alma 26:12, emphasis added)

Even though I thought I believed the Book of Mormon to be true, I found these verses impossible to comprehend or accept. For one thing, they didn't square with what I desperately wanted and *needed* to believe about myself so that I could continue in my illusion of self-sufficiency. After all, wasn't I a child of God, made in the image of the Creator of the Universe? Wasn't I a "god in embryo?" That must mean I had *something* going for me. I might have a few problems, but I wasn't "nothing" (regardless of what these prophets had said).

Year after year passed, and in my own way I kept trying, and trying, and trying. I prayed (but not too hard, nor too consistently) and I read

the scriptures (but not too often, nor too deeply). I fasted and asked the Lord to give me the strength to overcome (but not too wholeheartedly). I confessed to my bishops and to my stake presidents. I repented, over and over again. It seemed that my every prayer began, “Heavenly Father, please forgive me for my sins...” but invariably, as soon as the stresses in my life built up again, I would seek comfort or relief by returning to my behaviors. How well I came to identify with the disgusting and pitiful image in **3 Nephi 7:8**, of returning **“like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow to her wallowing in the mire.”**

SLIDING INTO THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR

As the years passed and none of my intentions to change had any lasting effect on my slavery to lust, my indomitable spirit began to crumble, like the façade it was. I was starting to accept the adversary’s continually whispered lie that I was already beaten. The “dream” of one day overcoming these habits started to fade, and I found myself coming to the conclusion that I would *never* be free of these behaviors, that I would die still enslaved to the power of this degrading life of sin and sensuality. I found myself sliding deeper and deeper into despair. Hadn’t I tried as hard as I could to quit? Hadn’t I wept bitter tears over my endlessly repeated failures? Bludgeoned with discouragement, I eventually came to the point where I had practically lost all hope. I began to reason that if I had not been able to free myself with the effort I had put forth year after year, then the amount of willpower required to ever *really* succeed was beyond me.

As my hope faded, I began to be tormented with an awful specter. I had so far escaped what I had always considered to be the ultimate disaster, adultery, but the way I was going, I wasn’t sure how long I would hold out. I frequently wondered what it would feel like to stand in front of the Stake High Council, in front of brethren I had known and respected for years, and be confronted with sins serious enough to strip me of my priesthood and my Church membership! I started to picture the scene, not realizing that Satan was subtly, carefully preparing my mind to accept the inevitability of just such an outcome. I didn’t recog-

nize that this true principle was operating—that all things are created spiritually before they are created physically, *even our destruction*.

I eventually came across some literature on sexual addiction and even though I was startled to see myself in those pages over and over, that awakening still didn't give me the power to change. I considered the possibility that I might actually be an "addict." I knew an addict was someone who could not shake off his habit, no matter how hard he tried, and whether I liked it or not, that description fit me perfectly!

Terrified by the nightmarish future that each indulgence in my addiction made more likely, I found myself asking a question every addict must eventually face: Had I had enough? Had I given away enough of my soul; had I lost enough integrity? Had I finally fallen far enough? In short, was I humbled enough yet to be willing to offer the Lord whatever might be required to put myself within the saving influence of His mercy and grace?

I have since come to realize that this whole process of admitting powerlessness is the same "tutoring" experienced by the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11–32**). In other words it is a process of becoming humble—truly humble. I had never before identified with this poor, lost prodigal. After all, I had never left the Church. I believed in its teachings. I was faithful in so many ways. It was only in what I thought of as "just this one area" that I was stalled out. In my perverse pride, I ignored my desperate need for humility, insisting that life teach me the hard way. On the one hand, I prayed for help from God, while on the other, I clung insanely to the very poison that was destroying me spiritually, and which I *knew* would eventually wreck my whole life. Just as I had turned a deaf ear to the prophets' insistence that I was "nothing," and that in my own strength I was weak, I also ignored Alma's invitation to become humble without having to be compelled:

Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God...without stubbornness of heart, yea, without

being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. (Alma 32:16)

In my stubbornness of heart, insisting on finding the way out of my dilemma without coming down into the depths of humility, I was setting myself up to be compelled, or as Alma puts it, “blessed.”

And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man sometimes, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved. (Alma 32:13)

HITTING BOTTOM—THE DEPTHS OF HUMILITY

And save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. (2 Nephi 9:42)

“Hitting bottom” is an expression that’s been used in recovery work ever since the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous. It refers to the devastating emotional bankruptcy most of us have to reach before we are finally ready to seek divine help in a state of total surrender. When we fall, we *keep* falling until we hit something that stops us—the bottom. Hitting bottom is the inevitable end to a fall.

Most of us hit a few jarring bumps before we hit that final “bottom.” Said another way, we get several wake up calls, inviting us to see ourselves as the fools we are before we finally *do* wake up. Looking back at my own life, I am now amazed to see the depths of foolishness and degradation I fell into but could not (or would not) see.

One “wake-up call” happened after I moved to the east coast to attend graduate school. I had just graduated from BYU in Provo, Utah, and the culture shock of my new environment was enormous. The year was 1974. The “women’s movement” was in full swing, and the university I was attending was in the forefront of the “bra-burning” crusade.

As a result, a number of the young women on campus dressed very immodestly. In this temptation-laden environment, my addiction kicked into high gear. I graduated from noticing things I couldn't avoid to actively seeking out opportunities to lust. One day I was in an elevator with a fellow graduate student. A girl got on the elevator and stood opposite, facing us. After a moment she nervously crossed her arms. When she got off the elevator, my companion spoke up: "Did you notice how we both looked at that girl just now, you know, to see what we could see?"

I was mortified! I knew *I* had noticed her, and I wasn't surprised that he had too, but I had no idea he had noticed *me* noticing her! I felt like such a fool! My friend wasn't a member of the Church, *but he knew I was*. What kind of example was I setting for others about the morals of Latter-day Saints? I made some lame excuse about how sad it was that some girls dressed in such a provocative way that we guys had become conditioned to looking at *all* women that way. But my excuses didn't make it any better. They never have.

Did this wake-up call turn me around and motivate me sufficiently to change my behavior? Sadly, it didn't. I went on like this for another twenty-five years, and all along the way I had experiences that could have become turning points, but I never let them.

Another wake-up call came when I turned forty and the stake president interviewed me about being ordained a high priest. I confessed to him some things I had not previously cleared up. He listened intently, counseled me about my mistakes, and then set a date for my ordination. I went home, relieved the confession had gone so well, and called my father to invite him to ordain me. He gladly agreed and I told him the day and time. He said he and my mother would be happy to make the trip and were looking forward to the experience. Moments after I hung up, the phone rang. It was the stake president calling to say he was sorry, but after thinking it over, he had come to the conclusion that we needed to wait awhile for my ordination. I protested that I had already told my parents, and explained how embarrassing it would be for me to call them back and postpone it. He kindly, but firmly, reminded me he was a "judge in Israel," and he had the responsibility to see that things were

done properly. He also apologized for not realizing earlier what needed to be done. With no other recourse, I called my parents back and told them the ordination had been postponed, but even then I was still light years away from being able to explain why. Did this incident wake me up? Again, sadly, no. I was able to “white knuckle” it (abstain through sheer willpower) long enough to be ordained, but no “heart-deep” change had happened, and, for the umpteenth time, my repentance didn’t last.

I have heard stories from other men about things they have gone through before they finally hit bottom. More than one brother has been fired from his job for viewing Internet pornography on his computer at work. One said: “I knew it wouldn’t happen to me,” and he took the chance—and got caught. Others have been disfellowshipped or excommunicated for serious sins. Some have lost their families. The devastation can take on terrible proportions if that is what is required to wake us up. When I hear these stories, I think, “There, but for the grace of God, go I,” and I thank God my addiction didn’t take me any further down than it did.

THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE OF AGENCY

It seems it is the Lord’s will to let us learn from our own experience to distinguish good from evil, to learn what works and what doesn’t work. The Lord loves us and wants us to repent so we don’t have to suffer, but agency is a sacred principle, and He will never violate our agency by forcing us to do what is right:

I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. (Alma 29:4, emphasis added)

God allows us to experience the natural consequences of our actions until we finally learn that **“wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10)**. Elder Neal A. Maxwell described this painful teaching process:

If we have grown soft, hard times may be necessary. If we are too contented, a dose of divine discontent may come. A relevant insight may be contained in reproof... *One may be scorched by humiliation, so pride can be melted away. Whatever we lack will get attention, one way or another.* (Ensign, Nov. 1995, 25; emphasis added)

Those of us who have been compelled by addiction to be humble face a great opportunity. We can respond to the humbling events we have already experienced and thus not require still more serious and painful humbling. In some educational programs, you can take a test part way through the course, and if your test results show you understand the current topic, you can move on to the next principle. I think the Lord teaches us that way. If we haven't learned the lesson yet, it keeps coming back until we “get it,” but if we can show Him we have learned the lesson already, we can “graduate” and we won't have to go through the sting of further “learning experiences.” When the course is as painful as addiction, graduating as quickly as possible makes a lot of sense. If I could have one wish, it would be that the testimony of my own experiences might help others to turn around where they are, rather than have to experience the full pain of devastation that continuing in addiction will surely bring. AA refers to this as “bringing the bottom up,” or in other words, “getting” the message without having to experience the worst consequences addiction can bring.

POWERLESSNESS TURNS TO HOPE

I have gained so much through attending Twelve Step meetings in the Heart t' Heart program. In Heart t' Heart, each of the original Twelve Steps of AA is paraphrased in a “scriptural version.” The scriptural version of Step One reads: “(We) admitted that we of ourselves are powerless, nothing without God.” Here was that principle of “nothingness” that I had so long resisted. Now, somehow, life had taught me the

truth of it in an irrefutable manner. I could not deny that when I weighed the years of effort I had put into trying to quit against the results my efforts got me, “nothing” was a perfect description. The facts of my life bore witness to me of my powerlessness so plainly that I could not deny the truth in Step One when I heard it. As Alma had promised, by being compelled to be humble, I had finally been brought to a **“preparation [willingness] to hear the word” (Alma 32:6)**.

Paradoxically, admitting my powerlessness did not make me feel hopeless. I started studying the Twelve Steps in earnest when I began attending Heart t’ Heart meetings. There I met people who were being freed from a variety of destructive behaviors. Hope was everywhere. I began to think: “If they can quit, maybe *I* can, too.” I have heard it said that the first thing a person experiences when they start attending Twelve Step meetings is a rebirth of hope. That began happening for me as soon as I got out of isolation and started going to meetings.

Hope continued to dawn on me as I started to turn to the Lord **“with full purpose of heart” (Mosiah 7:33)**, willing to see myself as a fool and admit my **“nothingness,” (Mosiah 4:5, 11)** or in other words my total need for Him. With this new perspective, the scriptures started to take on deeper and *more hopeful* meanings. Truly, just as was promised in **2 Nephi 9:42**, the Lord was opening the scriptures unto me!

For example, when I went back and looked at those verses I mentioned earlier that had bothered me, I found I had not been hearing the whole message. I had only heard that part of the message I thought condemned me. What I was missing was the realization that in each of these passages there was also the promise of help, of success, of joy! These inspired writers weren’t condemning me for *not* using my own power—they were testifying to me of *God’s* power and inviting me to take advantage of it. Listen to what Ammon said:

My brothers and my brethren, behold I say unto you, how great reason have we to rejoice; for could we have supposed when we started from the land of Zarahemla that God would have granted unto us such great blessings?

And this is the blessing which hath been bestowed upon us, that we have been made instruments in the hands of God to bring about this great work...

Blessed be the name of our God; let us sing to his praise, yea, let us give thanks to his holy name, for he doth work righteousness forever. (Alma 26:1, 3, 8)

Does this sound like someone who is beaten down and discouraged over being “nothing?” Quite the opposite. Ammon is bubbling over with enthusiasm in his rejoicing. His exuberance even evokes a reprimand from his brother.

And it came to pass that when Ammon had said these words, his brother Aaron rebuked him, saying: Ammon, I fear that thy joy doth carry thee away unto boasting. (Alma 26:10)

But Ammon could not be deterred from his rejoicing in *the Lord*.

Behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God. Yea, *I know that I am nothing*; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things. (Alma 26:11–12, emphasis added.)

Ammon confesses his own nothingness and his own weakness, and in the same breath gives glory to God for being the One who has brought about these mighty miracles. His admission of powerlessness is far from discouraging; it is exalting! It’s all right that I am nothing, because Christ is *everything*! I do not have to be able to do all things, to move mountains and change the course of rivers, because I have a Friend who can, and who *does* do these things. He has moved the mountain in my life that I could not move! He has wrought an amazing change in me, one I thought would never happen!

Step One is an exercise in letting go of the notion that recovery is going to happen through our own strength. We will need to take action,

to take certain steps, but the power to do so comes from God. The amazing result is marvelous peace and joy!

MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER

Please take time to answer the following questions in your recovery journal.

1. Let's revisit the truth we read in **2 Nephi 9:42**—“**Save they shall cast these things away [pride in their learning, wisdom and riches], and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.**” I'd like to invite you to walk head-on into the miraculous process of entering the depths of humility by honestly reviewing your own history of sex-related behaviors. I recommend that you write your history down—even if it's for your own eyes only. Start with your earliest awareness of sexuality and each experience since. At what point did you begin to feel these thoughts or activities were “getting out of control”? What have you tried in your efforts to stop? Do you feel truly powerless over this behavior yet? Do you accept that it is actually an addiction?
2. When we are trapped in addiction, we are not only doing things we wish we weren't, we're also letting a lot of good things that we wish we were doing slip out of our lives. We are even as the apostle Paul wrote: “**For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do**” (**Romans 7:19**). Write about how this applies in your life. Make a list of the things you once enjoyed, or hoped to enjoy, that have either slipped out of your life or haven't materialized because of your addiction.
3. In **Mosiah 27:29**, Alma the Younger, uses words like “**gall of bitterness,**” “**bonds of iniquity,**” “**darkest abyss,**” and “**racked with eternal torment**” to describe his depths of despair and humiliation. Write about whether you can relate to any of these expressions.

Write about the hardest moments you've experienced so far—or have seen someone else experience, and know in your heart that you're headed for yourself.

4. In **Alma 38:11 and 14**, Alma reminds his son, Shiblon, to not be lifted up in pride, but to **“acknowledge your unworthiness before God at all times.”** Write a list of people, places, and circumstances you have used as excuses to turn to sexual addiction. How has using them for excuses been a way of avoiding admitting your own **“unworthiness,”** or bondage to addiction?

5. Read the “Psalm of Nephi” (**2 Nephi 4:16–35**) in its entirety. Note the “I am...” statements Nephi makes about himself: **“I am encompassed about, ...wretched.”** Nephi doesn't seem to be afraid to tell the straight truth about his human frailties. Write about how you feel about being “encompassed about” by addiction. Write about how you feel when you finally say, “I am *addicted*,” or even “I am an *addict*.” How can facing this truth set you free?