

# *Dear Bishop,...*

An Open Letter of Encouragement  
and Support to Bishops, Counselors  
and Loved Ones Seeking Hope  
and Help for Those Afflicted with  
Addictive Sexual Behaviors

Philip A. Harrison

HEARTHAVEN PUBLISHING  

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RECOVERY MATERIALS FOR THE LDS COMMUNITY

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We have chosen to use the traditional masculine pronoun throughout this booklet, but please be aware that these concepts apply to both men and women who struggle with addiction to pornography.

This booklet is designed to provide information to counselors, bishops, branch presidents, and stake and district presidents on recovery from addiction to pornography, to help them deal more effectively with members who may be struggling with this problem. However, results from applying these principles will vary with the individual. As a result, this booklet is distributed with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in rendering specific psychotherapy or other professional counseling services to any individual. Additionally, the author takes full responsibility for the ideas presented in this booklet. They are not presented as the official doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but are distilled from the experiences of the author and many others who have found recovery from sexual addiction.

## Introduction

Dear Bishop (and others concerned with the rising tide of addiction—particularly to pornography),

It is a chilly morning in March, 2005, as I write this introduction to you. It's been a very white winter here in Cache Valley, Utah, where Phil and I live. As I write, I try to picture each of you in your various times and places.

In a few days, Phil and I will be traveling to Oakland, California, and there we will meet with many of you in a leadership session of the “Recovery Conference” being conducted and carried out by the combined efforts of several stakes and the missionaries and facilitators of the LDS Family Services Addiction Recovery Program.

Phil and I stand in humble awe and amazement at the opportunity the Lord has opened to us to be able to share our experience and testimony with so many of our “beloved brethren” (and sisters as well). We testify of the healing power of our Savior’s Atonement and of the principles and practices that have opened the way for us to access that power. *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage* has served as the foremost approved study guide of the LDS Family Services A.R.P. program since 1995. Phil’s effort to add his witness to mine, found in *Clean Hands, Pure Heart*, continues in the same spirit and with the same motive as *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*—to do all that we can to help with one of the missions of the Church—to perfect the Saints, or in other words, to establish Zion.

As we prepared to attend this upcoming conference, Phil began to feel a persistent witness that he should summarize and share in a little booklet the precepts and practices that have given him the gift of a genuine remission of the sin of pornography addiction. Phil wanted to offer this booklet to bishops and other priesthood leaders. Like me, (and Ammon), Phil can’t say enough of the Lord and His mercy. Together, we waited five years—just as we would if Phil were recovering from cancer—to publicly share the miracle of his remission, his complete change of disposition toward the evil of pornography. Truly, as his wife, I can testify that his virtue and his innocence have been restored through the miracle of Christ’s ability to make “white as snow” that which was previously “scarlet,” or “as wool” those sins that were “red like crimson.” (See Isaiah 1:18) It is Phil’s voice—his experience, strength and hope—that you will hear in the text of this open letter to each of you, but I hope you’ll hear me “humming along” in the background. We will speak in Oakland next

week (March 11–13, 2005), and wherever we are called upon to carry this message, as with one heart, one mind and one voice. We thank you for your service. We express no desire but to love you and encourage you through our testimonies. We testify to you that you can have an unwavering “brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20) for your ward member’s full recovery as he or she comes to know the living experience of the Savior’s reality and availability to them.

We remain ever your fellow servants in our Savior’s kingdom and pray that you will find something in this booklet which, according to your prayerful study and application, will bless you in your stewardship.

— Colleen C. Harrison  
author of *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*

## Dear Bishop, Counselor, Friend or Family Member,

Thank you for taking a few minutes to read this booklet on helping those who are afflicted with sexual addiction. Some may question why I am writing this open letter, as I have no priesthood line of authority to counsel bishops, no professional credentials to advise therapists, and no personal acquaintance with your loved ones. While that is true, may I humbly suggest that I do have something to offer. I have what might be called the “authority of experience.” I have been there. I know the hell of sexual addiction and I know what it took for me to get free of it. I also have a great deal of love and compassion for those who struggle to help people trapped in addiction. Since getting into recovery, I have spoken with many bishops and have heard of many others, including counselors and family members, who are looking for help in addressing this very difficult problem of overcoming addiction. It is my prayer that we can discuss some thoughts here that will be of help to you.\*

In this booklet you will find hope and encouragement as we cover principles of repentance and actual *remission* of sin based squarely on the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have a very personal interest in this subject, as this is the journey I have walked. I spent nearly 35 years of my life in slavery to pornography before I allowed these principles to open the power of the Savior’s Atonement to me. When I finally let the Atonement work in my life, I began to recover from my obsession. Today it is my joy to bear testimony of the transforming power of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I share with you some of the principles that have helped me, I pray that they will also assist you in your efforts to help those you are called to serve.

As we begin, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge each of you in your dedication to our Father in Heaven and to our Savior. You have a tremendous opportunity to bless others! I have had great love and respect for those choice men who served as my bishops over the years. It always seemed that whatever gifts of personality and charisma they had before their calling were magnified and added upon when they received the special mantle of “bishop.” *Bishop* Brown was somehow different from *Brother* Brown. I can honestly say that, in my youth, my feelings for my bishop often bordered on adoration. Paradoxically, those very same feelings

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*\*I take full responsibility for the ideas presented in this booklet. They are not presented as the official doctrine of the Church, but are distilled from my own experience of recovery from sexual addiction and from the experiences of many others*

made it extremely difficult for me to confess my transgressions to him. I just couldn't face what I was sure would be his disappointment.

In recent years, my respect and compassion for the bishops of the Church has only increased. Through the stories I have heard from others who struggle with sexual addiction, I have seen a glimpse into the burden you carry in trying to help the members of your ward. I know the burden I have placed on my bishops through the years. My prayer and desire is that my testimony in this brief overview will lift, encourage and assist you in your calling. I do indeed testify that through the Savior's grace, each and every one of the men and women you try to help can be healed and cleansed and have their agency and virtue restored.

## The Nature of the Problem

Considering the proliferation of pornographic material and the ease with which a person can be exposed to it, I am sure there are some bishops and counselors who understand from their own experience the tremendous pull pornography can exert on a person. I can also believe that there are some of you who have felt relatively little temptation in this area. For years, I looked with envy at those men around me who seemed to show no interest in such salacious material. I can imagine the frustration it must cause someone who has never been addicted to pornography to try to counsel one who has become trapped by it. I saw firsthand the frustration my own bishops experienced in trying to help me. The bishop encourages the wayward member to break away, to refrain from viewing these materials and to avoid the practice of masturbation that usually accompanies indulgence in pornography. At some point, usually after watching the member go through several relapses, the bishop may ask, "Why can't you just *stop*?" The afflicted member is just as baffled. He may desperately *want* to stop—may have already tried a hundred times on his own—yet can't make his reform last. This is when the heartbreaking truth manifests itself—he is *addicted*.

All who are involved [in pornography] become victims...The minds of youth become warped with false concepts. Continued exposure leads to addiction that is almost impossible to break. Men, so very many, find they cannot leave it alone. Their energies and their interests are consumed in their dead-end pursuit of this raw and sleazy fare. (Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Tragic Evil among Us," *Ensign*, November 2004, 61)

## It's Not About Resolve

I recently heard a priesthood leader encourage participation in a particular church activity, saying it would give the members the “resolve” to eliminate pornography from their homes and lives. This advice reveals a very common misconception in the minds of non-addicted people about those suffering with an addiction—the idea that what is lacking in the addict is the *desire* to be free of pornography or the *resolve* or determination to turn away from it.

I cannot tell you how many times I tried to work up more courage or determination to quit using pornography. However, I was never able to abstain indefinitely, permanently, by the use of sheer will power or what is often referred to as “white-knuckling.” Each time my “resolve” lasted only so long. Stresses or temptations would build up again and I would inevitably fall once more. I could “quit” over and over again—I simply lacked the ability to “stay quit.” We have all heard the joke about the man who said, “I can quit smoking any time I want to—I’ve done it a hundred times!” We smile at this poor man’s rationalization, but in truth it is no different for the person trapped in addiction to pornography.

Imagine with me for a moment the following scenario: A man is held prisoner in a medieval castle prison. His own misdeeds have brought him here. Now he is chained hand and foot to a stone wall and can do nothing but writhe in regret and shame at his original foolishness. Clothed in rags, he is starved and covered with sores and infection. He is sick and senses that he may soon die. One day he is allowed a visit from his local priest. The priest, dressed in the clean, tidy and solemn apparel of his office, looks at the man, then at his chains, and says: “If you really wanted to badly enough, you could just will those chains to fall off your hands and feet and you could walk out of here.” Such advice would, of course, be ludicrous. It mocks the prisoner’s plight and adds further frustration and shame to his misery.

Returning to our modern example of imprisonment, may I suggest that it is just as useless, and even hurtful, to suggest that a person who is enslaved by pornography could quit if he only had the resolve or the determination. Most people so enslaved desperately want to be free, but can’t find the strength in themselves to get free.

Dear Bishop, I promise you that overcoming addiction isn’t simply about personal resolve. It isn’t about mustering up more will power from within. The person who is addicted has lost that power. His agency is in chains. That is the horrifying reality of addiction. That is what makes it much worse than just a “bad habit.”

## What Is Addiction?

There are many ways to define addiction. Some use a strict definition, limiting addiction to a deepening dependence on chemicals that a person might take into his body, such as alcohol, nicotine or cocaine. Those of us who have become addicted to sexual stimulation can testify that a person can become addicted to a behavior as well as to a “substance.” Actually, there are chemicals involved in sexual addiction as well—they are the internal chemicals produced by the body itself that give the “high,” or the thrill the addict seeks.

For my purposes, it is enough to define addiction as a condition where agency has been forfeited to the point that a person finds himself unable to stop a particular behavior, even though it is severely damaging his life. It may be very hard for someone who has not been caught in this kind of trap to understand this condition of powerlessness. When a person’s agency is intact, he can decide to do something and simply do it—or he can decide not to do it, and refrain. An addict has lost a great deal of this ability.

The free agency possessed by any one person is increased or diminished by the use to which he puts it. Every wrong decision one makes restricts the area in which he can thereafter exercise his agency. The further one goes in the making of wrong decisions in the exercise of free agency, the more difficult it is for him to recover the lost ground. One can, by persisting long enough, reach the point of no return. He then becomes an abject slave. By the exercise of his free agency, he has decreased the area in which he can act, almost to the vanishing point. (Marion G. Romney, “The Perfect Law of Liberty,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 43)

Addiction not only takes away our ability to make choices, it also interferes with the normal functioning of our thinking. We keep hurting ourselves and others in ways that don’t make sense to us or to anyone around us. Quoting President George Albert Smith, President James E. Faust said:

If you cross to the devil’s side of the line one inch, you are in the tempter’s power, and if he is successful, you will not be able to think or even reason properly, because you will have lost the spirit of the Lord. (James E. Faust, quoting Pres. George Albert Smith, “The Devil’s Throat,” *Ensign*, May 2003, 51)



## Removing Roadblocks to Recovery

One of the hardest challenges a person trapped in addiction faces is to take the very first steps on the pathway of recovery. How much easier your calling as bishop would be if everyone in your ward who suffers from sexual addiction came willingly, openly seeking your help. I suspect, however, that many people suffering from this problem wait until a scheduled interview, such as for a temple recommend. The interview brings up questions that finally prompt them to tell you the truth and you are left in dismay, unable to give them the recommend you thought they merited.

Sadder yet, others do not reveal their bondage, even in interviews. It isn't until a distraught spouse or parent comes to you in pain and anxiety that you learn their secret. Perhaps at that point you take the painful initiative to invite the individual to visit with you. I suspect that all too often, however, you are met not with a repentant attitude, but with rationalizing, minimizing or outright denial of the problem. This response reflects the soul-deep shame and fear the individual feels to admit his problem and begin the process of change.

Let's talk a bit more about some of these reactions you may encounter and how you may prayerfully choose to respond.

### Denial and Minimizing

How often do people use the phrase, "It's not *that* bad!" to describe their situation? You can be sure that if a person is saying this to you, he's hearing it whispered to himself in his own heart by the adversary, the father of lies. It's as if he's been mesmerized and brainwashed by the lies he's believed and now also tells. Your effort to tell him the truth in a loving but plain way may be like a light piercing the dark dungeon to which he's become acclimated.

As D&C 121:43 says, there is a time to reprove (correct with gentle discipline) with sharpness (clearly, with plainness). Truth told plainly but with love offers the suffering individual a chance to grab a lifeline and begin the climb out of the pit. If the addict is denying the seriousness of his sins, the message he needs to hear is: "It really *is* that bad. It is like a physical illness that, if not treated, will only get worse over time. Every day this problem is ruining marriages, causing loss of employment, and damaging personal spirituality—even causing some to lose their standing or membership in the church. You *cannot* indulge in this behavior without suffering serious harm!"

## **Rationalization**

Whether they express the following thoughts to you or not, addicts often justify their behavior with rationalizations like: “Everyone does it,” “You’re not normal if you don’t look,” “It’s the only way I can bear up under all the stress in my life,” or “If my wife were more responsive to my needs, I wouldn’t have to resort to pornography and masturbation.” A person will not get well until he is willing to let go of these lies that the adversary whispers into his mind. Even a true statement, like “It’s everywhere—lots of guys indulge in this stuff!” is made into a lie because it is inevitably combined with the disastrously false conclusion: “...so it’s not so bad that I do it.”

A person has to come to know and truly believe that he or she really does have to live a higher standard than those who have not made covenants with the Lord Jesus Christ if he is to live a happy, productive life. Here is where you can remind him of the significance and solemnity of the covenants he made at baptism and in the temple (if that applies) to take the name of Jesus Christ upon him and seek his salvation from and through Him and His Spirit. Nothing less—no half measures—will bring him the power he needs to escape from these behaviors that will eventually destroy all he holds dear.

As you testify of these things to him, pray continually for the Spirit of the Lord to fill your heart and your voice with His perfect combination of truth and mercy so that there’s no energy or spirit of blame and shame in your tone or demeanor. One word of caution, however: if you treat these offenses casually, you will probably reinforce in his mind the addict’s own rationalization that “it isn’t that bad.” In most cases, the addict will not take his problem any more seriously than you do.

## **Shame**

I imagine that most of the people who come to their bishop do so with a deep sense of embarrassment and shame. Sexual addiction seems to automatically cause deep feelings of shame. It is hard for me to imagine anyone coming to their bishop with less than a broken heart and a contrite spirit, but I suppose some may appear to take their sins lightly. In trying to reach such a person, you may feel the need to be more direct. Shame, however, is never a righteous tool for correcting and straightening the human soul. It only serves to rivet lies to the heart of the addict, convincing him that he deserves nothing better than to continue to slide steadily downward toward hell.

While the addicted person may be full of denial and resistance—may have every excuse under the sun for his choices—you can be sure that in his deepest heart, he *knows* he is lying—and he is already deeply ashamed. The Light of Christ or, as we often refer to it, his “conscience” is still alive, though it may only be the equivalent of the tiniest spark. The individual may appear to be past feeling, but you must not give up your faith *in Christ* that He, the Savior, is still very much alive even in the deepest dungeon—and that His Light is in there somewhere. Thus, there is no need on your part to resort to shame as a device of correction. In fact, shame is the adversary’s greatest tool. While on one hand, Satan tells the addict his actions are not that bad, on another level he tells him that he is the worst of sinners and is beyond the love of God and any hope of redemption.

Bishop, if you have not experienced this first-hand, please believe me. Most likely the brother or sister you are trying to help feels incredible disgust for themselves, bordering on self-hatred. I stated above that it is important for a person to acknowledge how serious his behavior is, but it is *just as important* that he not judge his sins as worse than they are, or think that they cannot be forgiven. The message of how serious this sin is must be balanced with the truth that it is not beyond the saving power and grace of the Savior’s marvelous Atonement.

## Hopelessness

When Satan succeeds in convincing a person that his sins are unforgivable, the person may give up all attempts at repentance. “What’s the use?” he thinks. “I’m beyond hope. The Lord doesn’t want anything to do with someone like me.” This is one of the adversary’s most deadly weapons. If a person loses all hope, he becomes an even easier target for temptation.

Despair is described as a loss of all hope, which we could also define as a loss of faith. One of the first things a person needs in order to begin the repentance process is a feeling that it can work—that he really can become free from this terrible enslavement. What he needs is hope. Bishop, you can help him recover that feeling of hope by referring him to stories of others who have become free from this addiction (such as Gerald and LoAnne Curtis’s book, *The Worth of Every Soul*, or my own book, *Clean Hands, Pure Heart*). You can teach him from the scriptures that other good men have suffered temptation and sin, as evidenced in Nephi’s plaintive cry:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am

encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. (2 Nephi 4:17–18)

As the member begins to break away from his sins but is troubled by the fact that he is still subject to temptation, you can give him valuable reassurance that the sin is not in *being tempted*, but in *giving in* to the temptation.

## **There Is Hope for Recovery**

The greatest tool we have to combat Satan’s lies, which lead to loss of hope and faith, is the truth. We need to teach through precept and example the reality of the Savior’s love and Atonement. As Elder Boyd K. Packer said:

The gospel teaches us that relief from torment and guilt can be earned through repentance. Save for those few who defect to perdition after having known a fulness, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no offense exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. (Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19)

How does a person regain the faith that forgiveness from the Lord is possible, and that the Lord wants him back, no matter how bad his mistakes have been? One of the first things that touches a person’s heart is the experience of being accepted and loved by another person. If you, as the person’s bishop or counselor, can extend love and personal acceptance to the member, it will be an example to him that the Lord also accepts and loves him. While some may be concerned that such expressions of love and acceptance may be misconstrued as condoning the sin, such fears are unnecessary.

Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father in the story welcomed the son home without reservation. He showered him with gifts and celebrated his return with feasting. No one need imagine that the son’s path was going to be easy from that time on. He had many incorrect patterns and behaviors still to change and overcome, but he had begun the process of change—he had come to his father’s house, where he knew he would be fed and clothed—and the rest of his repentance could continue from there. Nothing in the father’s loving embrace and acceptance would hinder that. In fact, the father’s love contributed greatly to the son’s ability to repent.

Thus, you have a rare opportunity to stand in the place of the Lord in extending love for the sinner who is trying to return. Your love will rekindle hope in the heart of the addict that if you love and accept him, perhaps the Lord can also. If you still feel any reluctance to reach out to such a member, first reach heavenward. Ask the Lord to endow you with the love He has for this sinner. His love for each sinner was such that during His mortal ministry he not only ate and otherwise associated with them, He gave His life that they might be rescued. His love is no less today.

When a person comes to another for help, he needs to hear the truth that he is not more powerful to mess up than the Savior is to heal and redeem him. He needs to understand that as soon as he humbles himself enough to turn to the Lord with real intent, the Atonement will begin to work in his life. Reassure him that *he* is not the problem. He is simply a good man with a problem, and that you and he stand together in opposition to our common enemy, Satan. Let him know that you and he, and all the rest of us, are dependent upon the Savior's grace and mercy, but that we can sustain each other in living the truth and letting go of the lies that tempt us on every side.

As I have accepted these truths and applied them in my life, my guilt and shame have been lifted and I have been restored to feelings of hope. The same can happen for each of our Heavenly Father's children that you counsel.

## **How Does One Begin to Break Free from Addiction to Pornography?**

The plague of sexual addiction has become so widespread, and causes so much heartache and pain, that concerned individuals from many quarters are trying to help. You may have heard suggestions such as these:

1. Place the computer in a room where there is a lot of traffic.
2. Have the computer screen face the doorway.
3. Install an Internet filter and/or reporting software on the computer.
4. Report in to a priesthood leader, counselor, friend or spouse at regular intervals.
5. Attend support group meetings, such as Twelve Step meetings.

These can all be helpful measures. It is particularly important for the addict not to try to solve this problem in isolation. Secrecy is part of the disease, and openness is an important part of the healing process. Support from the person's bishop is extremely important. Attendance at a Twelve Step meeting, such as LDS Family Services' Addiction Recovery Program (ARP) or Pornography Addiction Support Group (PASG), or Heart t' Heart groups, can also be very helpful. (More information on these groups is included at the back of this booklet.)

Let me reassure you about these groups. Some bishops have asked whether a person may get worse by associating with other sex addicts. This is an unnecessary fear. It is essentially unheard of that someone comes to one of these support groups to advertise his sexual activities or exploits. Considering the feelings of shame and embarrassment we experience as a result of our addiction, it is challenging enough to show up, thus admitting we suffer from this weakness. In addition, the meetings are structured in a way that focuses on the solution, not on the problem. The predominant use of scriptures, prayer and self-examination in light of gospel principles sets a spiritual tone to the meetings. Meeting with others who are working toward recovery and hearing their testimonies of what the Lord is doing in their lives is a comforting, encouraging and spiritually uplifting experience.

That being said, as helpful as all these approaches may be, they are not sufficient by themselves. They all have one limitation, namely they are all *external* supports. The support comes from *outside* the individual. In relying on them, the addict is borrowing strength from others. When he is away from that support or sustaining influence, he may fall again.

What is needed for a continual recovery that can be sustained in any situation is a heart-deep change in the person's desires—a total rebirth at the spiritual level. Without this heart-deep conversion, a person's recovery is not thorough enough. It is not complete. His abstinence may last for a while, but without this deep internal change, he will certainly relapse in time. How then does a person achieve a change that lasts? The truth is, without God it is impossible.

## **Divine Intervention Is Necessary**

Before I could obtain help from the Lord, I had to overcome a very damaging misconception. I believed I had to be worthy in order to approach the Lord. I had heard so many talks about sin causing us to "lose the Spirit" that I was sure the Lord wouldn't have anything to do with me until I cleaned myself up. What a trap! I was in a position where I couldn't clean myself up without the Savior's grace and power. Yet how could I

access that power if I couldn't come to Him until I was worthy? However, as I reflected on the Savior's mortal ministry, I recalled how often he was blamed by the Pharisees for eating and otherwise associating with "sinners." I began to believe that perhaps I might approach Him after all and not be rejected.

Where his addiction is concerned, an addict has surrendered much of his agency and has lost most of his ability to resist. However, there is one use of agency that he can still exercise. It is the decision and choice to reach out to the Savior, Jesus Christ. When Peter was sinking in the sea of Galilee and the waves and currents were so strong that he could not find the power to move his own legs, he *still* had the power to cry out to the Savior (Matthew 14:28–32). When Alma the Younger was in a coma-like state and had no power to do anything to leave his physical situation of total powerlessness, he could *still* cry out to the Savior to save him (Alma 36:18 and Alma 38:8). In other words, while addiction does rob an individual of a great deal of his agency, it seems that the one thing even the most wayward and messed-up person can always do is cry unto the Lord. This is the one act the adversary can never keep us from doing. No addict ever loses the ability to cry unto God to save him. President Gordon B. Hinckley has testified that our only hope is to come to the same place as Alma and do even as Alma did:

If there be any within the sound of my voice who are [caught in addiction to pornography], then may you plead with the Lord out of the depths of your soul that He will remove from you the addiction which enslaves you. And may you have the courage to seek the loving guidance of your bishop and, if necessary, the counsel of caring professionals.

Let any who may be in the grip of this vise get upon their knees in the privacy of their closet and plead with the Lord for help to free them from this evil monster. (Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Tragic Evil among Us," *Ensign*, November 2004, 62)

No Latter-day Saint can find freedom from his sins in any other way. No other power on earth or in heaven can restore a person's agency once it has been lost to this degree. It takes the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that

*your hearts are changed* through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. *And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh.* (Mosiah 5:7–8; emphasis added)

King Benjamin taught that in order to become free from the sins of this world, a person must be born again as a son or daughter of Christ and have his or her heart changed through faith on His name. There is no other way to be made free. This is also my personal experience. I could not obtain lasting relief from my addiction until I came unto Christ in a fuller, deeper and more personal way than I had ever before imagined possible.

In the passage quoted above, President Hinckley encouraged the addict to seek his bishop’s help. In my opinion, Bishop, the most important help you can give is to bear testimony to the addict that connecting with the Savior and drawing on His mercy and grace is his only sure hope. Truly, as the prophets have testified, He is the only One who can bring about a spiritual rebirth and free the addict from this terrible affliction.

I will now discuss some activities that have helped me in developing this relationship with my Savior. This closeness has proven so essential to my recovery. You may want to share these ideas as you counsel others in one-on-one sessions.

## **Connecting with the Savior Through the Scriptures**

Having been born and raised in the Church, I was no stranger to the four standard works. Beginning in Primary and Sunday School, and then in Seminary and Institute classes and in family settings, I read the scriptures. When people said, “Read the scriptures and it will help,” I mistakenly believed that the act of reading itself would be my salvation—that if I did this for the Lord, He’d bless me with what I desired. I had heard with my ears, but not with my heart, the Savior’s own testimony that the scriptures themselves were not the answer—but were meant to testify to me where I could find the answer:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and *they are they which testify of me.* (John 5:39, emphasis added)

As paradoxical as it may sound, it was not until I hit bottom, completely defeated by addiction—and knew it—that the scriptures began



to come alive with both the testimony *of* Christ and the testimony *from* Christ. No longer did I read them out of a sense of duty, nor did I feel proud of my knowledge of them. I read them seeking to *know* the Lord. Here are some ways I learned to truly feast upon the words of eternal life and to be filled with His Spirit and His strength through them.

### **Likening or Personalizing the Scriptures**

Nephi stressed the importance of likening the scriptures to ourselves in order to understand how they apply to us today (see 1 Nephi 19:23–24). One way to do this is to insert our own name into the scriptures to emphasize to our mind the truth of the Lord’s declaration: “What I say unto one I say unto all” (D&C 93:49). Elder Ronald E. Poelman of the Seventy gave a wonderful example of this kind of likening:

The prophet of this dispensation, Joseph Smith, and his companion, Sidney Rigdon, gave testimony of the gospel, as recorded in the 76th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. Each of us may receive a *similar* spiritual witness, and therefore I suggest that we may express their testimony as our own *in these words*:

“And this is the gospel...That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for [me], and to bear [my] sins..., and to sanctify [me], and to cleanse [me] from all unrighteousness; That through him [I] might be saved” (D&C 76:40–42). (“Divine Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 86; italics original)

### **Pondering the Scriptures**

We have often been encouraged to “ponder” the scriptures. To many, the idea of pondering suggests pausing to let a phrase sink into one’s mind. Taking time to let the Holy Ghost impress the message of the scriptures more deeply is certainly valuable. Writing down the impressions from the Spirit can bring even more insights and understanding. Elder Richard G. Scott has said:

You can learn vitally important things by what you *hear* and *see* and especially by what you *feel*, as prompted by the Holy Ghost. Most individuals limit their learning primarily to what they hear or what they read. Be wise. Develop the skill of learning by what you see and particularly by what the Holy Ghost prompts you to feel...*Write down in a secure place the important things you*

*learn from the Spirit. You will find that as you write down precious impressions, often more will come.* Also, the knowledge you gain will be available throughout your life. Always, day or night, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, seek to recognize and respond to the direction of the Spirit. (Richard G. Scott, “To Acquire Knowledge and the Strength to Use It Wisely,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 32, emphasis added)

As I studied the LDS Twelve Step recovery guide, *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*, I discovered that prayerfully pondering the scriptures, or “capturing” as it is called in that text, was an absolutely essential part of overcoming the lies that kept me returning to my addiction. Capturing (copying passages of scripture into my personal journal, then writing what the Spirit teaches me about them) has been virtually the entire foundation of my mighty change of heart. This process has helped me to hear and recognize the voice of the Lord as He conveys the truth to my mind. The scriptures are no longer just ancient records; they have relevance to my personal struggles and challenges. Capturing even a few verses of scripture has become an avenue through which the Lord continually teaches me the principles that keep my addiction in remission and my life free of this sin. Even more importantly, spending this time with the Lord each morning has opened up the channel through which the Lord’s power has come to rescue me from temptations I face during the day.

## **The Power of Prayer to Deliver Us from Temptation**

Coming to know the Lord through the scriptures and journal writing, including capturing, gave me a whole new perspective on prayer. Whereas for years I had gone through the motions of prayer, now things became different. I had a feeling for the Person I was talking to. I found I could write my prayers in my journal, and be ready in the moment to write any impressions that came to me in response to my pleas to my Father in Heaven. I found that if I exercised the faith to be ready to record what the Lord might say to me, I received more than I had before. My understanding of the Lord’s personal love for me increased greatly.

The time in the scriptures had given me a much better picture of the Lord’s true character. Gone were the old ideas of a stern, punishing God. When I came to really feel the love of God, I felt that I could truly approach Him and not be rebuked as a result. I no longer looked at the Lord as Someone who desired to condemn and punish me. I came to understand that He was, in fact, my greatest Friend, that He was willing to

be with me in all of my trials and do for me the things that I could not do for myself.

Once I came to see the Lord as my closest ally in this battle against addiction, I was able to act on the Savior's invitation: "Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not." (D&C 6:36, emphasis added). I found that I could turn to Him in the moment of temptation and ask Him to rescue me—to take the thought from my mind. I was amazed at the love the Lord exhibited through His willingness to do just that. There was no thought too small or too degraded for the Lord to take from my mind, if I brought my own willingness to the act of asking Him for relief.

Today I try to connect with the Lord each morning through prayer and the scriptures. I then keep a running conversation going with the Lord all day long. I may have to do many other things during the day, but I try to stay mentally close enough to the Lord that I can reach out to Him whenever the need arises, whether it be for rescuing me from temptation or to ask His advice on a perplexing problem. I have learned that the Lord meant what He said:

And again, verily I say unto you, my friends, I leave these sayings with you to ponder in your hearts, with this commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall call upon me while I am near—*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 88:62–63, emphasis added)

This is the most important key to recovery that I know. Being with the Savior and staying close to Him every day has been my only safety. The help of others is appreciated, and I perceive the Lord's love coming through them as well, but the Lord is the source of all strength and power, and I love Him deeply for what He has done in my life.

## **The Role of the Lord's Grace**

At the risk of repeating myself, I think it is important to emphasize that the actions of recovery—abstinence from acting out with pornography and masturbation—came after I went to the Lord and developed a relationship with Him, not the other way around. I couldn't make those changes in my life without the Lord's power, and I couldn't receive the Lord's power until I came closer to Him. The renewed relationship with the Lord was the vehicle of my recovery, not the reward

for it. The Lord has blessed me abundantly since I got into recovery; but I could not have gotten there if He hadn't been willing to help me first. I think I understand now what Paul said about grace:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4–10)

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

When I was in the depths of my addiction, with my agency damaged and all but gone, it was all I could do to call out to the Savior as Alma did. But the Savior has blessed me with a restoration of my agency, and I find that I can now choose not to sin. I still must remind myself, however, that it is through Christ that I am able to do this, not in and of myself. That is how grace operates in my life today. It is through grace that I “receive strength and assistance to do good works that [I] otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to [my] own means.” (Bible Dictionary, “Grace”)

## **When Can It Be Said That a Person Is “Recovered”?**

A good friend of mine was interviewed by his bishop to see if it was time for my friend to go back to the temple. The bishop asked: “Can you tell me for certain that this problem is over and done—that you will never go back to these behaviors?” That is a very challenging declaration for an addict to make. In a sense, it is like asking, “Have you reached perfection yet?”

The patterns of addiction are carved very deeply in most addicts. We have all had the experience of “repenting,” as we thought, only to fall again. To make a declaration that “all is in the past” sounds incredible, and may even be a dangerous attitude to adopt. How many times have we told ourselves that we would never act out again, only to find that such confidence set us up to let our guard down and slip once more. This is

why many say that while they may be “in recovery,” they would never say that they were “recovered” or “cured” of their addiction. Such thinking leads to complacency and slackening of the continual vigilance that recovery requires.

In addition, one who has not been there can hardly imagine how occasional tempting or seductive thoughts can linger on, long after the behaviors have ceased. Having trained my mind to go down certain pathways, I now have a heightened sensitivity to sensual materials. I have been free from acting out for over five years now, and the level of temptation I am subject to has decreased markedly, but thoughts still come to my mind every day which I must reject, often calling upon the Savior to remove them from my mind. As long as I keep doing this and the other things that help me stay clean, I am confident that I will continue to be blessed with abstinence, but I cannot let my guard down enough to say it is all behind me.

That being said, this mighty change of heart that the Lord has blessed me with is an amazing change from the constant preoccupation with sex and sexual thoughts that characterized my years of active addiction. Repentance has been replaced by a true remission of this sin in my life. I am amazed and immensely grateful to be able to say that I have been blessed with the miracle that King Benjamin’s people experienced:

And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, *because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.* (Mosiah 5:2, emphasis added)

There has been a major change in my thinking and in my desires, such that I don’t desire pornography any more. I can still be tempted, but there has been a total change of the inner environment of my mind and heart, which could only be brought about by “the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent,” to whom I am forever grateful.

How, then, can you as Bishop determine that a member has repented sufficiently to be trusted with a temple recommend or a specific calling? Fortunately, there are several good clues you can observe. The mighty change that a person must go through to be freed from addiction leaves some revealing marks on a person. I would suggest that you look for the following signs as indications of significant progress in recovery:

- Perhaps the indicator most frequently looked for by bishops is how long the person has abstained from acting out sexually. An increasing time of abstinence will certainly be evident in a person in recovery, but this is *not* a sufficient marker by itself. Most addicts go for periods of time without acting out. If sufficiently motivated, we can abstain through white-knuckle determination for weeks or months at a time, but this is not true recovery or remission. True recovery requires the deeper change of heart already mentioned. Because you will not want to wait years to see if a relapse occurs before you consider a member's repentance to be lasting, I have included other measures in this list.
- The person will be more humble and more willing to talk about his weaknesses and past mistakes. Shame will diminish as the Savior lifts his burden. Shame, by the way, is not humility. It is evidence that pride is still operating. When we humble ourselves before God, He removes our shame.
- The person will be willing to talk about his daily struggles. Instead of brushing off questions with glib reassurances, such as "I'm doing better now," or "Nothing to worry about," the person will be willing to share his daily temptations and his continuing need for the Lord.
- The member will be willing to tell you if he slips. One difference between a slip and a relapse is whether we keep it secret or not. Alcoholics Anonymous says, "We are only as sick as we are secret." If the addict keeps secret a recurrence of acting out, it could be called a relapse. If he is willing to quickly admit it and try to put it behind him, maybe it is only a temporary slip. The Lord has told us, "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43). Keep in mind that there may be several rounds of confessing before the final forsaking happens. This is to be expected when overcoming any bad habit or addiction.
- The person will take responsibility for his own actions and sins and will not be prone to blame others—his spouse, his parents, his leaders, his past.

- He will exhibit a spirit of peace and calm. The Savior promised that He would give us peace if we come unto Him. This peace should be observable.
- The individual will have a deeper relationship with the Savior. When you ask him to talk about the Savior, his replies will frequently come with emotion and will indicate a personal relationship, not just “Sunday School” answers. He will show evidence of coming to know the Savior as a person, not just an image or a concept.
- The individual will have a desire to help others recover. He will be grateful for a chance to share what he has learned and experienced with others who still struggle. While the Spirit has cautioned me not to share my story openly in sacrament meeting (because it may cause others to judge unrighteously), there have been times when I have been prompted to share one-on-one with individuals, some of whom have then revealed that they have struggled themselves. When a person has been blessed with the miracle of recovery, he will have the desire to share that miracle with others.
- Because of the gratitude a recovering addict feels to the Lord for this miraculous change, he will have a desire to serve Him. Such a person will be willing to serve in callings and otherwise participate in Church activities.
- Since this miracle has only been brought about through a close relationship with the Lord, the recovering addict will understand the need to stay close to the Lord through a continuing program of regular spiritual activities and will continue to pray, to ponder and to capture the scriptures.
- The member’s improved relationship with the Lord will be evident in his prayers, which will be heartfelt and meaningful. Invite him to pray with you so that you have the opportunity to feel the spirit of his prayers.

These indicators of recovery are, of course, only suggestions of things to look for. People are individuals and no two are exactly alike. However, these are characteristics you will see most of the time in people experiencing true recovery, because these are the fruits of the same Spirit that gives each person recovery.

After all these suggestions have been made, I am certain that you will rely most of all on the direction of the Lord through the Holy Ghost in your decisions. This is the Lord's kingdom and He knows what is best for each member at any one time. The Lord may tell you that a person should be restored to full fellowship even if He knows the individual may slip again. Or He may have you continue to wait, even if the individual seems to show all the signs of true and sincere recovery. I know the Lord will bless you as you prayerfully carry out your stewardship. My prayers are with you in this important work.

## **Please Don't Forget the Spouse**

Sometimes a problem with sexual addiction comes to the attention of a bishop or counselor because the spouse comes in for help, suffering deep pain and not knowing what to do about the situation. Other times the addict is the first to come in; conversations with the spouse may come later. Either way, it is important to recognize that the spouse will have serious questions and issues. She also needs your help and support. In most cases, the spouse will be the wife of a man addicted to pornography, so I will address these issues as they relate to women. However, they apply equally to husbands whose wives are dealing with this addiction.

When she learns that her husband is involved in pornography, a wife often feels that she isn't good enough, isn't pretty enough or doesn't have an attractive enough body. If she were prettier, more attractive, perhaps her husband would not be drawn to these inappropriate images. The truth is, addiction isn't about those things at all. In fact, a man's attraction to these images has nothing at all to do with his wife. Addiction to pornography is a separate issue entirely and, in most cases, began well before marriage. Many men with this addiction assume that marriage will cure their "problem," but it never does. Addiction develops because of an insufficient relationship with God, not because of an "inadequate" wife.

In trying to help the spouse of an addict, please take her needs seriously. Take time to listen to her concerns. It is important to reassure her: "This is not about you personally. *You* didn't cause this problem. *You* can't fix this problem. This is a problem between your spouse and God, and that is also where the solution lies."

Encourage the wife to use the same principles to deal with her feelings of rejection and betrayal that her husband is using to recover from his addiction. The wife needs to take her burden of heartache and confusion to the Lord, just as the husband needs to take his addiction to the Lord. A



closer relationship with the Father and the Son will help the wife to find comfort and guidance in the difficult decisions she may face.

If possible, it is very helpful for the wife to participate in a support group. Isolation is as damaging to her as it is to the addict. Often, the same organizations that provide support for the addict also give help to the spouse or other family members affected by the addiction. If both husband and wife are working in a recovery program based on spiritual growth and personal reliance on the Savior, most marriages can weather this trial.

I need to make one more special appeal. I have heard of at least two separate cases where a bishop suggested to the wife that her husband's sexual addiction would not have developed, or could be cured, if the wife paid more attention to him sexually. As I mentioned above, addiction is not about whether the addict is getting enough sex. Please, *please* do not suggest that the wife is in any way responsible for this addiction. Even suggesting that she can help him overcome this problem by "paying more attention to him" implies it is her fault. If the wife were handicapped, ill, or otherwise unable to participate in sex, that wouldn't excuse the husband for going elsewhere, would it? I can bear personal testimony that the Lord will help a man adjust to whatever challenge or personal situation he is faced with. The attentions of his wife (or lack thereof) is never an excuse for inappropriate sexual behavior.

## Conclusion

I would like to conclude with a few final thoughts. First of all, this addiction has most likely been present in this person's life for an extended period of time. Fortunately, we don't have to spend as long getting out of it as it took to get into it, but it does take time, certainly months and frequently years. I encourage you to be patient and long-suffering as you work with him or her. You will see periods of success and times of slipping, but the time between slips should gradually increase. If acting out continues without episodes becoming further apart in time and less serious, the addiction is still active. In such a case, the addict needs to do more intensive spiritual work in connecting with the Lord and surrendering his will to the Lord in all areas of his life. For recovery to be real and lasting, for the changes that result from a more spiritual life to be permanent, the connection with the Lord must be ongoing.

One thing you may see that may make you question whether recovery is happening or not is that other areas in the addict's life may seem to get worse as he gives up his addiction to pornography. He may be less peaceful

or less patient or considerate for a time. We see this frequently. It happens because all the problems that the addict was running away from by using his addiction are still there, waiting for him when he gets clean or “sober.” There may be a period of time when some counseling about his other relationships, such as with his spouse or children, might be helpful.

The path of recovery is not just about giving up a single bad habit. It is about becoming a person who is willing to face his feelings and the facts of his life with the Savior as his counselor and strength. Recovery is the process of surrendering our whole life to the Lord, and allowing Him to remake us in His image. In other words, in finding recovery, the addict is doing the very same thing that we *all* must do sooner or later:

Yea, [first] come unto Christ, and [then] be perfected in him, and [then you will be able to] deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32–33)

Dear Bishop or counselor, may the Lord bless you as you continue in this important work of assisting the Lord in saving souls. They are precious in His sight, and I know you will have His gratitude as well as the gratitude of those whom you help to find recovery. I know this is the Lord’s work. I have seen His hand in it. I thank Him for the miracle of recovery in my own life and pray for you and for all my brothers and sisters. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Some Suggested Resources

### LDS Family Services

LDS Family Services offers help to individuals and couples through counseling and support groups. Family Services' Addiction Recovery Program (A.R.P.) and Pornography Addiction Support Group (PASG) Twelve Step meetings are available in many places, and can be organized in new areas with the involvement of local priesthood leaders. Times and locations of A.R.P. meetings can be found by calling your local Family Services office or on the Internet. Go to [www.providentliving.org](http://www.providentliving.org) and click on "Social and Emotional Strength," then on "Addiction Recovery Support Groups."

### Heart t' Heart

Heart t' Heart was founded in 1991. It is not a Church-sponsored program, but rather a "community resource" based on LDS standards. Its goal is to help LDS people overcome various addictive problems. Support is also given to spouses and others concerned about addiction in the lives of their loved ones.

Two Heart t' Heart publications that may be of particular interest are the 24 page booklet, "Speaking Heart t' Heart on Sexual Addiction," and the pamphlet "Speaking Heart t' Heart to Our Priesthood Leaders."

Heart t' Heart Twelve Step meetings are held in many locations, including several online meetings that can be attended over the Internet, making them available to members everywhere. Information on Heart t' Heart can be obtained online at [www.heart-t-heart.org](http://www.heart-t-heart.org). For information on meetings, click on "Find a Meeting." You can also write for information to: Heart t' Heart, P.O. Box 247, Pleasant Grove, UT 84062.

### Hearthaven Publishing

Hearthaven Publishing publishes recovery materials for the LDS community. Their most widely known book is *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage* by Colleen C. Harrison. *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage* was the official text used by LDS Family Services in their Addiction Recovery Program from 1995 to 2005. It has also been the official text of Heart t' Heart since its inception in 1991.

In 2004, Hearthaven published *Clean Hands, Pure Heart: Overcoming Addiction to Pornography Through the Redeeming Power of Jesus Christ* by Philip A. Harrison. *Clean Hands, Pure Heart* is used in Heart t' Heart and is finding wider and wider use in the LDS recovery movement.

You can reach Hearthaven Publishing online at  
[www.hearthavenpublishing.com](http://www.hearthavenpublishing.com)

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