

Getting Free

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

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Prologue

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

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

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

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

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

- T.S. Christensen

Chapter 1 – An Epidemic of Addiction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2 – Descent into Madness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3 – Beginning Recovery

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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