

Pornography and Secrecy

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Paul grew up in a small community. He was part of a large family, went to church every Sunday, and got along well with his parents and siblings. His parents taught him the principles of the gospel and encouraged him to live by these, setting the example in the way they lived their lives. As Paul got into high school, he participated in various school activities including cross country, track, basketball, and choir. Paul seemed to have everything going for him. He was on the seminary council of his school, was a starter on the basketball team, and got his first girlfriend during basketball season his senior year. He planned to go on a mission and was called to serve overseas. His high school sweetheart wrote throughout his mission and ended up waiting for him. They were married in the temple several months after Paul returned from his mission and began their new married lives together. They were best friends and headed towards a great future together. What could go wrong?

Then it happened. The secret sin that had destroyed so many people's lives and families crept into their home – Pornography. At first it didn't seem like that big of a deal to either one. Paul chose to be open with his wife and together they went in and talked with the bishop. It was an occasional occurrence at first and neither one of them would realize at that time how big of impact pornography would have upon their future lives together.

The Secret Sin

Often, we tend to keep our sins and misdeeds very private. Pornography seems to have taken privacy to the next level. One family reported that their child was bright, cooperative, and appeared fully invested in living the gospel. It wasn't until one day when the father disclosed that he struggled with pornography that the son finally admitted he had been for some time. When the father asked why the son had never admitted it despite questions about it during priesthood and father interviews, the son just reported being too afraid to disclose and worried what his parents would think.

It seems that most all of us feel the pressure to fit in a certain image. We are taught values and want to impress our parents or spouse and fear disappointing others. We have a reputation to uphold with a lot of things riding on it. We are afraid what others might think if they knew we had a problem, particularly when it comes to pornography. That is why it could very easily be going on within anyone's home and the parents or spouses have no clue. Often times it is not that the user doesn't want help, but that they fear what others might think of them and their interest and use of pornography. The secret must continue in order to keep everything at status quo.

In Paul's family, everything appeared very normal on the outside. They attended weekly church meetings, went to social events with friends, engaged in community service, served in church callings, and taught their children the principles of the gospel. If people suspected something, Paul never heard about it. Paul and his wife tried to live the façade on the outside that they had a good relationship, lived morally clean, and had an ideal family lifestyle, but on the inside felt hurt, unhappiness, and frustration.

Spencer W. Kimble said it best when he said “The chief cause for failure and unhappiness in life is trading what you want most for what you want in the moment.” What Paul wanted most was happiness and success in life, a loving family, and an intimate and rewarding marriage. Instead, he gave all this up for the pornography that he wanted at the moment. How cunning Satan is that he can take something that appears so small, so common place throughout the world, and bring it into our homes and tear the family to pieces. Paul’s children didn’t know what all the stress and conflict was about, but they started to ask their mom and dad if they were going to get a divorce. Despite all this discomfort, it was still not enough to get Paul to stop his addiction.

Pornography: What’s the big deal?

The Truth to Faith booklet describes pornography as “tragically addictive.” It goes on to say “Like other addictions, it leads people to experiment and seek more powerful stimulations. Those who experiment with it and allow themselves to remain caught in its trap will find that it will destroy them, degrading their minds, hearts, and spirits. It will rob them of self-respect and of their sense of the beauties of life. It will cause terrible damage to their family relationships.”

President Thomas Monson indicated how many view pornography as a “victimless crime.” Pornography is not however victimless. Evidence of this fact presents in the numerous couples and families that have been torn apart by it’s devastating effects on marital intimacy, trust, and mutual respect. President Gordon B. Hinckley gave a talk in October 2004 General Conference specifically addressing the problem of pornography he said in response to the many letters he had received from “broken-hearted wives.” The effects of pornography are devastating on individuals, couples, and families. While it may not appear a big deal out the outset, as time goes on, its damaging effects become more and more clear.

In Paul’s marriage, it began to chip away at their relationship and happiness. There were times of abstaining from the behavior; however, it never seemed to leave them alone. It became a barrier between him and his wife which resulted in conflicts that would go late into the night, lost trust, guilt and shame, and a clear loss of the spirit their home. They were no longer best friends. Their communication went down-hill, they started to try and fix each other, their sexual relationship deteriorated, and they developed unhealthy patterns of interaction as a couple. Paul had viewed pornography occasionally as a child; however, the devastating effects of its use weren’t clearly evident for him until after marriage.

One of the biggest tragedies of pornography in marriage is the loss of true intimacy. Pornography is a deceptor, a counterfeit of true intimacy that exists between couples. Because it seems to temporarily fill the voids and unmet needs in a person’s life and marriage, it is easy to miss the deteriorating effects it has on the relationship as a whole. Individuals who continue their use eventually find that they have a need to turn more and more to pornography as the relationship needs go increasingly unmet due to the increased problems brought on by pornography in the relationship. This creates the cycle of addiction that must be stopped if the marriage and intimacy is to be saved. Individuals and couples must eliminate the pornography from their lives and work on building and restoring the true intimacy in order to experience fulfillment and satisfaction in their relationship.

Recovery is Possible:

Everybody's path to recovery is unique. There are a variety of resources and strategies that can be used. There is not just one right way, but one thing is very important is to get started doing something actively to deal with the addiction and its effects. Although there is not one "right way", there are some key components that are critical to a successful recovery. First is that you can't do it yourself. Paul initially thought that he could overcome his problem by reading self-help books, talking with his wife and bishop, and using his personal will-power. Initially, Paul questioned if he was really even an addict, but over many years of relapse despite personal efforts, he eventually came to the realization that he could not do it himself.

The church is currently using service missionaries to facilitate 12 step groups specifically relating to pornography addictions in addition to the traditional drug and alcohol 12 step programs. This can be a great resource in breaking the cycle, getting the secret out, and obtaining help and support from others. These groups are confidential and consist of personal sharing and study from a workbook from LDS Family Services entitled "A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing."

While for some people, this may be enough, others find they need additional professional help to break the unhealthy personal and relationship patterns. There are a number of therapists who have developed specific training in dealing with pornography addictions. They help individuals and couples to understand the factors contributing to the unhealthy cycle and develop strategies and techniques that can lead to long-term recovery and increased intimacy in relationships.

Paul and his wife finally determined to get serious. Paul realized he had been taking a minimalistic approach to getting help, doing the least possible in order to recover. Paul changed his approach and reached out for professional help in addition to attending 12 step meetings and seeking the support and council of his bishop. Paul's wife also attended therapy and began attending the 12 step meetings designed for spouses of pornography addicts and found a great sense of comfort and support in this. Paul and his wife have come to realize and experience recovery in their lives. They now have hope for a different future, free from the negative effects of pornography. They both realize that although pornography seemed to destroy their marriage and family for a time, with appropriate help, commitment, and effort towards change, they are building the beautiful and intimate marriage they initially dreamed of.

Note: The name and some circumstantial information has been change to maintain confidentiality.

Resources:

True to the Faith (2004), 117–18

Thomas S. Monson, "Pornography, the Deadly Carrier," *Ensign*, Jul 2001, 2

Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Tragic Evil among Us," *Ensign*, Nov 2004, 59–62