

# Chapter

# 1

## *My Story*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PUBERTY, LONELINESS AND INSECURITY**

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

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

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

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

## **MISSION AND MARRIAGE— NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, OLD PROBLEMS**

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

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

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

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

## **A NIGHTMARE OF TRYING AND FAILING**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF MY SLAVERY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **COMING TO LOVE THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **MAKING THE MOST OF THIS CHAPTER**

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

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

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

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

Now for some questions relating to this chapter:

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

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

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