

A Clarion Call

By Steven P. Croshaw
President and Co-founder of SA Lifeline Foundation

“Pornography is neither harmless nor helpful. Pornography use is not simply a habit. It is a mood altering, belief changing, relationship damaging, addiction forming, socially harmful, spiritually deadening, life crippling practice through which one practices the ways of the adversary.”

Jill C. Manning, Ph.D.

For several years I have felt a great desire to communicate important information to priesthood leaders concerning the vital and unique roles Bishops and Stake Presidents have in working with and helping those who are caught in an addiction with internet pornography. Because of my personal experience with pornography and sexual addiction, I have firsthand knowledge on what I speak of, both from my own painful journey and that of hundreds of others who I have become acquainted with in my path of recovery that has spanned more than 45 years. I provide my experiences, good and bad. I also humbly make a clarion call to all who work with individuals that struggle with addictions of any sort, but particularly pornography and sexual addiction. Don't give up on them. Hold them accountable. Don't minimize their behavior or allow them to place the blame on others. Help them find the healing and recovery that is possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Please understand that I do not use the term “addict” to demean or shame individuals whose lives have become unmanageable because of their addiction. There simply is not a more accurate word. Bear in mind that individuals who come to you will not want to acknowledge that they have an addiction or, worse yet, that they are an “addict”. This is a form of denial and will hamper their efforts toward recovery.

The Spiritual Threat of Pornography

Based on a spiritual standard with eternal consequences, internet pornography is one of the greatest threats the world has ever faced. Some may think this an over-statement. I clearly think not. The statistics regarding the magnitude of the challenges facing individuals, marriages, families and society related to pornography and sexual addiction are alarming. No family will be untouched. To emphasize the critical nature of this issue please consider the instruction of Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a conference address given April 2005 entitled “Pornography”:

“Now the corrupting influence of pornography, produced and disseminated for commercial gain, is sweeping over our society like an avalanche of evil.”

“I know that many of you are exposed to this and that many of you are being stained by it.”

“Here, brethren, I must tell you that our bishops and our professional counselors are seeing an increasing number of men involved with pornography, and many of those are active members. Some involved in pornography apparently minimize its seriousness and continue to exercise the priesthood of God because they think no one will know of their involvement. But the user knows, brethren, and so does the Lord.”

“The immediate spiritual consequences of such hypocrisy are devastating. Those who seek out and use pornography forfeit the power of their priesthood.”

“The scriptures repeatedly teach that the Spirit of the Lord will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. When we worthily partake of the sacrament, we are promised that we will “always have his Spirit to be with [us].” To qualify for that promise we covenant that we will “always remember him” (D&C 20:77). Those who seek out and use pornography for sexual stimulation obviously violate that covenant.”

“Patrons of pornography also lose the companionship of the Spirit. Pornography produces fantasies that destroy spirituality. “To be carnally minded is death”—spiritual death (Rom. 8:6; see also 2 Ne. 9:39).”

“Pornography impairs one’s ability to enjoy a normal emotional, romantic, and spiritual relationship with a person of the opposite sex. It erodes the moral barriers that stand against inappropriate, abnormal, or illegal behavior. As conscience is desensitized, patrons of pornography are led to act out what they have witnessed, regardless of its effects on their life and the lives of others.”

“Pornography is also addictive. It impairs decision-making capacities and it “hooks” its users, drawing them back obsessively for more and more. A man who had been addicted to pornography and to hard drugs wrote me this comparison: “In my eyes cocaine doesn’t hold a candle to this. I have done both. ... quitting even the hardest drugs was nothing compared to [trying to quit pornography]” (letter of Mar. 20, 2005).”

“At a recent stake conference a woman handed me a similar letter. Her husband had also served in important Church callings for many years while addicted to pornography. She told of great difficulty in getting priesthood leaders to take this problem of pornography seriously: “I got all kinds of responses—like I was overreacting or it was my fault.”

“Pornography also inflicts mortal wounds on our most precious personal relationships.”

“When persons entertain evil thoughts long enough for the Spirit to withdraw, they lose their spiritual protection and they are subject to the power and direction of the evil one. When they use internet or other pornography for what this bishop described as “arousal on demand” (letter of Mar. 13, 2005), they are deeply soiled by sin.”

Priesthood Leaders Can Help

It is essential for all to understand that **an individual who is seeking recovery from his pornography and sexual addiction is in charge of his own recovery.** His spouse is not in charge, his Bishop is not in charge, his therapist is not in charge--he is in charge. No one can run a marathon for you.

However, priesthood leaders are uniquely positioned to make a dramatic positive impact in the battle with the adversary for the souls of those who are caught in the chains of pornography and sexual addiction. Unfortunately however, leaders may also unknowingly enable those that are seeking help and counsel by underestimating the power of pornography and sexual addiction. It is vital to recognize that internet pornography is dangerously addictive, and that it is an unparalleled tool used by the adversary to destroy individuals, marriages and families. Leaders must seek to understand how pornography and sexual addiction can effectively be dealt with. Furthermore, in spite of the deep despair that an addict experiences, there is hope for recovery.

Often Bishops and Stake Presidents are the first to be approached for help and direction by those who are suffering with the weight of sin and hypocrisy involving internet pornography. When a person finally determines to come forward because the burden has become too heavy to carry or because they have been caught “doing porn” at work or by an unsuspecting spouse, the well hidden secret of “doing internet pornography” is finally out; the seriousness of “the problem” is keenly felt; the need for help is recognized and priesthood leaders are called on for much needed help and direction toward repentance and recovery.

The Addicted and the Afflicted

Pornography usage creates two groups of people: *addicted* persons and *afflicted* persons.

A spouse and loved ones of a pornography *addict* are directly and dramatically impacted by pornography use. These *afflicted* individuals generally first seek help from their bishop as they seek to deal with the affliction brought on by the betrayal, lies and deceit of their addicted spouse. The pain and trauma of the afflicted spouse is acute and real. They believed their spouse was honest in their commitment to commandments and covenants—now that is called into question. The betrayed spouse is seriously wounded. As a result she is in great need of qualified help and support to find healing.

Those who are addicted to pornography are sons and daughters of God, but they are in grave danger of losing all that is most precious, important and dear to them. The potentially negative consequences in these circumstances cannot be overemphasized. What is now playing out in the lives of these good people literally threatens their eternal hope. Marriage and family relationships are threatened, church membership is threatened, jobs are threatened, and mental, physical and spiritual health is damaged. The seriousness of the corrosive and addictive behavior associated with internet pornography cannot be over emphasized. Addiction to pornography causes havoc in the addict’s life and in the lives of his loved ones.

At the critical moment when a priesthood leader is approached for help by the penitent addict as well as his afflicted spouse, there is a window of opportunity to provide essential help and direction. This opportunity must not to be minimized or mishandled.

When assuming a role in the recovery process “of those that are deeply soiled by sin,” priesthood leaders must take care to not become enablers of addicts who are not yet in recovery. Sadly, incorrect advice such as “just stop doing it...you’re better than that” or “more temple attendance will raise spiritual strength to overcome” or “develop a better relationship in the bedroom” have been suggested by the ill-informed as solutions to stopping behaviors of pornography addiction. This is akin to prescribing aspirin for cancer.

Well-meaning priesthood leaders often propose a course of recovery that primarily consists of daily prayer, scripture study and better time management, along with periodic check-ins with a priesthood leader for accountability. Addiction to pornography always involves spiritual, as well as mental and physical trauma. Although these are essential aspects of an addict’s recovery, incomplete advice regarding adequate recovery actions, misinformation, or lack of understanding of needed therapy and recovery programs will likely doom the addict to fail in his attempts to find genuine recovery and health.

Moreover, inadequate advice unwittingly provides the addict with a false hope that recovery from the addiction will be relatively quick and painless. The reality is that genuine recovery takes time and persistence, and rarely happens in isolation. The addict must come forward. Pornography addiction thrives in secrecy and isolation and is overcome only by complete honesty and transparency.

Consider the Needs of the Afflicted Spouse

Understandably, afflicted spouses of pornography addicts may be hesitant to get involved in a confidential recovery program shepherded by the addict’s priesthood leader. Rather, they tend to back away in confusion regarding their role in supporting the recovery of their addicted spouse.

At this point, the spouse and the addict typically believe that he is on his way to recovery because the priesthood leader is seemingly directing a program of recovery and they assume that they should just “stay out of it”. The priesthood leader has in essence promised the addict a cure that can’t work because it doesn’t provide for a pathway of genuine recovery. Genuine recovery necessitates complete honesty and transparency between spouses. Without it, isolation sets in and the addictive behavior resumes.

Very simply, recovery from addiction requires a new life path. One does not genuinely recover and then go back to their old life. ***The only recovery that lasts consists of learning to live in a new way.*** This new path allows the individual to successfully deal with situations that formerly triggered their addictive behaviors. Just as all people must engage in personal hygiene each day, the addict who is truly in recovery must engage in “recovery hygiene” each day for the rest of

their life. This new path is not a burden—rather, it is the life the addict has always wanted but felt they could never have.

At this point, let me emphasize my awareness that the guidance of the Holy Ghost is an ecclesiastical leader's most important guide. My experience confirms that. I also know from experience that many church leaders feel unprepared and unequipped to deal with the realities of addiction recovery.

Therapy and 12-Step: Vital Keys to Genuine Recovery

A pornography / sexual addict will rarely choose to seek therapy or a 12 Step support program on his own. If priesthood leaders speak lightly or dismissively of finding a qualified therapist and attending a 12 Step support program, the likelihood of the addict considering them as part of a program of recovery is practically eliminated. Sadly, far too often the importance of therapy and 12 Step programs are suggested as “possibly being of some help” but not necessarily critical.

The treatment of sexual addiction requires a specifically qualified therapist. A marriage counselor is seldom qualified in the area of sexual addiction. Attending and actively participating in a 12 Step group is a vital part of the addict's genuine recovery because it clearly signals that the addict is no longer in denial and that he is willing to engage in the actions of recovery.

For those seeking help overcoming the behaviors of pornography and sexual addiction, the time of crises is not a time for trial and error in finding qualified help and effective recovery programs. What recovery takes and where qualified help is to be found are questions leaders should be prepared to answer when those seeking help come forward. Advance study and preparation is required in order to understand the nature of sexual addiction, what recovery takes and where qualified help for recovery can be found. Helpful resources can be found at www.SALifeline.org

Instead of unintentionally enabling the addict, priesthood leaders can facilitate recovery by remembering that sex and pornography addiction is more than a spiritual malady and is never just a “little problem.” Sexual addiction is a powerful physical, mental, and emotional addiction—with devastating spiritual consequences.

Qualified sexual addiction therapy and active 12 Step participation are not peripheral, rather they are central to genuine recovery. They treat and provide support for the addict as he heals spiritually, mentally and physically. They are vital to recovery. Evidence repeatedly confirms that if an addict does not participate in those recovery tools (therapy and 12 Step), he is unlikely to achieve true recovery. True recovery is defined as the ability to choose to not act out on his addiction. If he achieves sobriety and then quits working on recovery, the likelihood of relapse is very high. In order to avoid these negative results, leaders must emphasize the need for qualified therapy and long term participation in 12 Step programs.

If an addict continues to have periodic slips over the course of several months, he is not in recovery. Psychiatric evaluations and evaluations for depression may be necessary in some cases. A proactive priesthood leader and qualified therapist can help him arrive at this understanding.

If an addict states that he has been cured and no longer feels any compulsion to view pornography or act out sexually and yet is not actively working a recovery program, the leader should recognize that the addict is either unduly optimistic or less than truthful. The leader should help the addict understand that a four-pronged (spiritual, social, mental and physical) recovery from addiction requires ongoing maintenance for several years, indeed a lifetime. If a leader does otherwise, he is enabling the addict in his addiction. A person with diabetes doesn't adopt a "new diet" for several years and then return to the former way of eating. It must be a permanent change in diet.

In supporting the spouse of an addict, priesthood leaders must also be careful not to be enabling. Any suggestion that her appearance, actions, or relationship with the addict on any level whatsoever is in any way responsible for the addict's behavior is absolutely devastating to her. Such a suggestion also creates an enabling environment for the addict to continue feeding his addiction by blaming others for his behavior.

If an afflicted wife believes that she is the cause of her husband's acting out, she will eventually expect that he will never become sexually sober because she will never be perfect. Each subsequent "acting out" episode by the addict will come to be seen as her fault, not his. The addict will not be held accountable for his actions and his addiction will be further enabled.

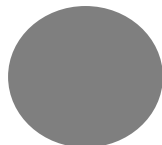
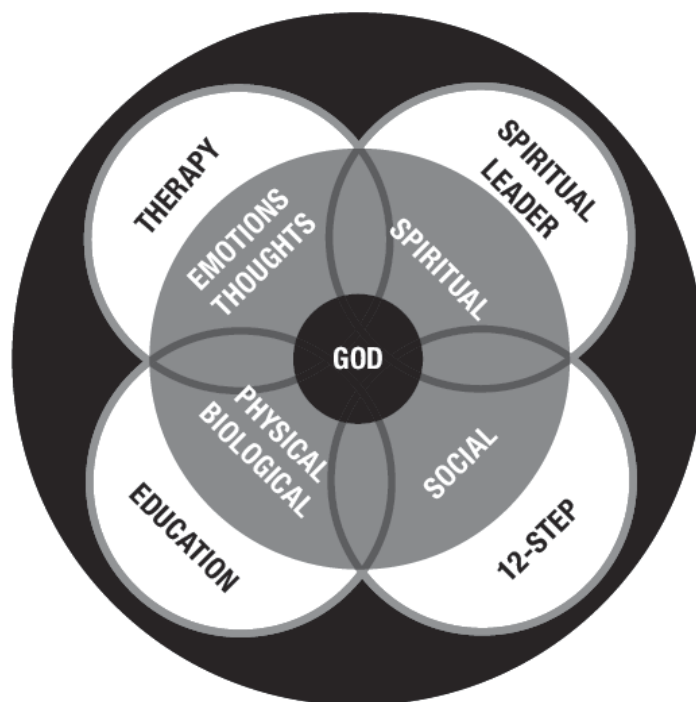
Few priesthood leaders encourage therapy and a 12 Step program for the afflicted spouse—and seldom enthusiastically. These tools are crucial to the spouse's recovery from the spiritual, mental and often physical injuries inflicted by her husband's conduct. Spouses also need to learn to recognize and overcome enabling behavior in themselves.

A Model of Healing and Healthy Living

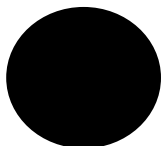
The image below illustrates the pathway to recovery. It is a path in which God is at the center of the individual's recovery. Resources of recovery include therapy, spiritual leaders, education and 12-Step. The addicted individual is in charge of centering their life around God and seeking out and utilizing all available resources. The healing process is an emotional, spiritual, social and physical process.

This is actually a model of healthy living for everyone—not simply a temporary pathway of addiction recovery.

A Model of Healing and Healthy Living



This symbolizes me. I am born into this world as a physical, emotional, thoughtful, spiritual, and social being. Each of these parts get damaged by my sexual addiction. I also have agency—the capacity to choose—and I must use that agency to take charge of my own recovery.



This symbolizes God, my higher power. God will both encircle me and be at the center of all aspects of my recovery. I must surrender to Him, and ask Him to guide me as I seek out the essential resources for my recovery.



This symbolizes my resources. As I take charge of my recovery, I must reach out for help as I am stuck in my addiction. Through the tender support and guidance of inspired spiritual leaders, my therapist, my 12-Step group, and on-going education, I can get on and stay on the path of recovery.

“We had it backwards; before, we always wanted the therapist, spouse, or God to do the stopping for us—to fix us. Now we stop; and then, in our surrender, the power of God becomes effective in us.”¹

¹ Sexaholics Anonymous, *The White Book: SA Literature*, 2002.

The Language of Recovery

It is vital to recognize that there is a language of recovery and a language of blaming and evasiveness. For instance, a most important part of my recovery – genuine recovery and not simply sobriety – was to first acknowledge the immense pain and deep trauma that I alone had caused in the lives of those I am committed to love and protect most. My actions were the direct opposite of what they should have been as a man, husband, and father. My spouse has suffered the pain and trauma of betrayal over decades of our marriage. She has gone through her own Gethsemane, suffering because of my choices – not hers. I have apologized countless times, but apologies are far too insignificant to even begin to make amends for my lies, deceit, and betrayals. I recognize that my actions must include not only working my own recovery, but thoughtfully supporting my wife in her efforts of healing from the wounds I have caused.

For much of our life together, my wife said that she did not feel much of an emotional connection between us. She was right. She could not feel such a connection because I was emotionally unavailable. Immoral, addictive behaviors, and the resulting shame and lies, as well as the hypocrisy of living a double life, smothered my emotional availability.

When men are progressing in recovery they will speak as I have just spoken. They take responsibility. They speak with directness and candor. And they finally begin to speak with a sense of compassion toward those they have deeply harmed.

True Recovery, Not Just Sobriety

My wife’s perspective is very valuable on this issue of genuine recovery vs. “white knuckle” sobriety:

“In an effort to re-build trust in our marriage, I focus on recovery—not sobriety. Because my husband can be sober but not in recovery, I try to be aware of addict behaviors such as lying, minimization, justification, blaming, emotional distance, or denial. If my husband is exhibiting such addict behaviors, trust cannot grow. On the other hand, when I see recovery behaviors such as kindness, patience, selflessness, humility, empathy, and love, I know that I am safe to begin trusting him more.”

Hope

Because pornography has now entered even the homes of the very righteous, it is tempting to surrender to an overwhelming sense of despair. But the scriptures and the prophets have told us clearly who will win this war. In the face of seemingly unbounded adversity, we need to remember that the Lord’s armies are fighting beside us.

There is hope for those caught in the chains of pornography and sexual addiction. However, recovery and the comforting blessings of peace that come with it do not *just happen*. **Like anything else of value in life, hard work and sustained effort in an effective program of recovery is absolutely required.**

There is significant effort required to find genuine and lasting recovery. There are qualified people and programs to assist those who honestly desire to be helped. God will bless all who are involved in this battle with the adversary when they, with a humble hearts, honestly seek Him. The atonement of the Savior has given countless thousands of addicts healing and rest from sexual addiction as well as those who are afflicted as spouses. **Those who honestly approach recovery with a sincere desire will find it.**

The Trumpet Sounds

My clarion call is to study and understand the gravity of pornography and sexual addiction. Read and study the books recommended in this manual. Study the 12 Steps as found in the LDS Family Services Addiction Recovery Manual and the **White Book** published by Sexaholics Anonymous. Locate and seek to strengthen the LDS Family Services 12 Step PASG (Pornography Addiction Support Groups) meetings in your area and start attending them for your own experience and understanding. If no meetings are functioning in your area, help start one and seek out qualified people to provide leadership in the meetings.

Find out where the Sexaholics Anonymous meetings are in your area and invite someone from that organization to help you understand their 12 Step program. Encourage those who you are aware of that have experience in recovery from sexual addiction to become leaders in the LDS PASG 12 Step Programs. Locate a qualified sexual addiction therapist that you can with confidence refer those needing counseling to.

This is not a time to look the other way and hope “this problem” will take care of its self. It will not. It is not the time to hope that someone else is taking care of the programs of recovery in your area and that you can simply refer those seeking qualified help to unknown people and programs. In order to successfully develop the necessary resources to win this battle, every church leader must be purposefully engaged. It is vital to enter the battle armed with knowledge and understanding, seeking the Lord’s strength that you can be an instrument in His hands to help those who are chained to addiction. The pathway of recovery does exist. It is based in the gospel of Jesus Christ and in repentance.

It is my hope that church leaders will understand their influential role in assisting pornography addicts find the resources needed to attain genuine recovery from an addiction that will destroy their life if minimized or under-treated. Church leaders can help immensely by encouraging the addict to:

- 1) seek out qualified sexual addiction counseling,
- 2) actively participate in a 12 Step recovery group,
- 3) educate himself about the nature of and recovery from sexual addiction,
- 4) humbly seek God’s help.

Recovery from pornography and sexual addiction is possible!

Helpful resources:

“He Restoreth My Soul: Understanding Pornography and Breaking the Chemical and Spiritual Chains of Pornography Addiction” by Donald L. Hilton, M.D. (2010). Forward Press Publishing. Available at www.SALifeline.org

“Understanding Pornography and Sexual Addiction: A Resource for LDS Families and Leaders”, (2011). Forward Press Publishing. Available to www.SALifeline.org

“What Can I Do About Him? Me?” by Rhyll Anne Croshaw (2012). Forward Press Publishing. Available at RhyllRecovery.com