

Speaking Heart t' Heart on Sexual Addiction

A Brief Introduction—What is Heart t' Heart?

Heart t' Heart is a community resource designed to help Latter-day Saints overcome compulsive or addictive behaviors by encouraging and supporting them in studying and applying the principles of the gospel in order to establish and maintain a close, personal relationship with our Father in Heaven and our Savior, Jesus Christ. While we wholeheartedly support the Church and its teachings, please note that we are not a Church-administered program. Heart t' Heart was established by faithful Latter-day Saint men and women who have been saved from the devastation of addiction in their own lives by coming to Christ and experiencing His atoning power. To those who may read this booklet on sexual addiction, we offer a sincere welcome to the strength and hope found in this recovery program.

This booklet was written to answer some frequently asked questions about how Heart t' Heart views and deals with sexual addiction.

PART I. TO THE ADDICT

We are aware from the stories of those who participate in Heart t' Heart that sexual addiction affects both men and women. It is most commonly the man who is addicted and the wife who struggles with the effects of her husband's addiction, but the opposite case is also not uncommon. Therefore, in Part I, we have avoided the use of gender-specific language in an attempt to make this booklet accessible to all who may need it. Part I addresses the concerns of the addict, while Part II addresses the concerns of the spouse. While we do not specifically address same-sex attraction in this booklet, we encourage any with that challenge to apply the principles recommended here. We have found that these principles of recovery are universally valid.

Why is this program called Heart t' Heart?

One of the implications of the Heart t' Heart name is the strong emphasis on *heart-deep change, not just behavioral change*. In this spirit, Heart t' Heart has adopted the original position of the Twelve Step philosophy: Change *must* be voluntary and it must involve a person's spiritual depths—their *beliefs*, as well as their thoughts and behaviors. It must come from the inside-out. In other words, to be effective and lasting, it must be a change of heart. It is the testimony of the prophets that only God can bring about such a deep-seated and far-reaching change. Such change comes only when our will (desire) to change is joined with His power to change us. As people who have placed themselves under covenant to Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints can find divine help only through turning our hearts to Him and His atoning power. We maintain that nothing short of this will do.

Why is Heart t' Heart concerned with sexual addiction?

Heart t' Heart defines an addiction as *any* detrimental mood-altering behavior from which a person can find no lasting release. As we have been reminded in numerous recent messages from our Church leaders, improper indulgence in sexuality is highly addictive and has the power to eventually destroy us—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

We who have suffered from the terrifying bondage of addiction to sexually indulgent behaviors, including the use of pornography with its attendant evils, know by our own experience how this addiction robbed us of our ability to connect with the Spirit of the Lord. We watched as it damaged our family relationships and challenged the confidence our spouses and children should have been able to have in us. Looking back, we see plainly how our effectiveness in our families and in our Church callings was curtailed. We realize today that our addiction to sexual stimulation had become our “god,” drawing our loyalty and love away from everyone and everything else in our life. Enslaved by it, we became willing to risk everything to continue our indulgence.

The tragic, confusing and maddening truth for most of us was that this reality was going on at the same time we were striving to be faithful

and active in the Church. The terrible gulf between our righteous desires and our enslavement served only to increase our sense of shame, degradation and hopelessness.

Why do people in Heart t’ Heart use the words *addiction* and *addict*? I don’t really think *I’m* an addict!

Many General Authorities of the Church, including President Hinckley (*Ensign*, May 1998, p. 49), have made increasingly frequent and fervent reference to the reality of sexual addiction among the members of the Church. Consider the following statement from Elder Richard G. Scott:

One of the most damning influences on earth, one that has caused uncountable grief, suffering, heartache, and destroyed marriages is the onslaught of pornography in all of its vicious, corroding, destructive forms. Whether it be through the printed page, movies, television, obscene lyrics, the telephone, or on a flickering personal computer screen, *pornography is overpoweringly addictive and severely damaging*. This potent tool of Lucifer degrades the mind, heart, and the soul of any who use it. All who are caught in its seductive, tantalizing web and remain so, will become addicted to its immoral, destructive influence. For many, that addiction cannot be overcome without help. The tragic pattern is so familiar. It begins with a curiosity that is fueled by its stimulation and is justified by the false premise that when done privately, it does no harm to anyone else. Lulled by this lie, the experimentation goes deeper, with more powerful stimulations, until the web closes and a terribly immoral, addictive habit is formed. (Elder Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, May, 2000, p. 36; emphasis added.)

Many of us who have struggled with a pornography habit, or other sex-related behaviors, thought at first the term “addiction” was too severe. We insisted we just had a “problem” which we could overcome with a little more time. We were sure if we tried harder, our own willpower would be enough. Eventually, our own actions convicted us

as we tried over and over to quit and found that we couldn't for any significant length of time. We were forced to accept the devastating reality that these behaviors actually had control of us.

One of the first things we had to grasp in order to begin to recover was the true nature of our behavior. It was far more than a mere habit. Thinking it was something minor or controllable by willpower alone was part of our self-delusion. Such thinking, we eventually realized, had only furthered our three-fold (physical, emotional, and spiritual) illness, using denial to excuse ourselves from seeking help. Gradually, as part of the process of coming down into the depths of humility and being willing to become fools before God (2 Ne. 9:42), we came to realize that the term "addict" did fit us after all.

Shouldn't we avoid referring to ourselves in negative terms? Doesn't that reinforce the problem?

For those of us who have pursued this Twelve Step recovery program, "addict" is no longer a negative label, nor do we use it to excuse improper behavior. It is a liberating admission of our need for continual, daily communion with the Savior through the Holy Ghost in order to stay abstinent. A helpful comparison might be to think of a person with diabetes who finally admits it and seeks the continual life-sustaining administration of insulin. The term "addict" reminds us that through our past actions, we have developed a heightened susceptibility to sexual temptation. We have also found that the Savior, and *only* the Savior, can administer the ongoing life-saving power we need to become and to remain free from sin.

How is sexual addiction like other addictive problems?

Sexual addiction has several factors in common with all other addictions, whether they are to substances (like tobacco, alcohol, drugs or food) or to a behavior (like spending, gambling, overeating or overworking). These common factors are:

Escape: The person indulging in addictive behaviors, if honest with him or herself, will admit they use the substance or

behavior to “relax,” to get away from some past or present source of worry, insecurity, confusion, frustration, loneliness, or other stress.

Tolerance: The person becomes accustomed to the amount of substance or degree of involvement with the behavior that originally gave them relief from their stress. Gradually, they require higher “doses,” but experience less relief from problems and less of a “high.” This is the progressive nature of the disease.

Loss of control: After using an increasing amount of their “fix” over a period of time, and experiencing increasing problems in their life, the person often tries to stop or cut back, and finds they can’t, no matter how determined or desperate they feel. It begins to feel as if the addictive problem has taken on a life or will of its own.

Withdrawal: If the person is able to quit for a time, severe withdrawal symptoms may develop. These symptoms may be physical, mental and/or emotional in nature. They drive the person back to the addictive behavior to find relief, now from the withdrawal symptoms. Thus, this cycle of demoralization and insanity digs a deeper and deeper pit of despair.

These characteristics of addiction apply dramatically to sexual addiction. Indulgence in sexual escapism leads subtly, yet inexorably, to deeper and deeper involvement and certain entrapment.

Alcoholics and addicts talk about getting sober or “clean.” How is sexual sobriety defined in Heart t’ Heart?

In speaking of sexual sobriety, Heart t’ Heart subscribes to the same definition used by Sexaholics Anonymous (SA): abstinence from *any* form of sex with one’s self or with partners other than one’s spouse. This abstinence must also include the elimination of lustful thoughts. As Latter-day Saints we cannot accept a lesser definition. The prophets have defined the same standard for us: Total abstinence before

marriage, and complete (physical, mental and emotional) fidelity after marriage.

While most people experience some sexual curiosity in childhood and adolescence, ideally, such behavior is smoothly integrated into the ongoing maturation of the individual. Eventually, voluntary boundaries are maintained in obedience to the standards the Lord has set. Unfortunately, for those of us who became addicted to sexual stimulation, this ideal was either not experienced or not maintained. Normal curiosity or innocent exposure grew into deliberate lust.

Consequently, through our wrong choices, we have learned there is no safe amount of lustful thinking or fantasizing. Even the briefest of intentional glances can damage us spiritually. It is widely understood that thought precedes action, and that continued indulgence in impure thoughts will eventually lead anyone to surrender their defenses and give in to the temptation to commit more serious sin. But lust causes damage by itself, even before it develops into further actions. In Heart t' Heart, we consider lust itself—not just acting upon it—as something we must learn to withstand by calling on the Savior's power in the moment we are tempted, our own power having proven repeatedly to be insufficient.

I have heard the term “recovery” used, as well as “abstinence.” Are they the same thing?

No, they are not. This is an important distinction to make. One of the ways this understanding has come about in Twelve Step circles is through the early experiences of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). When the first few men in A.A. started to get sober from alcohol, they and their loved ones noticed that underlying negative beliefs and ways of interacting with others still remained and needed to be dealt with. We who have dealt with sexual addiction have discovered the same thing. If we want to get well, we must go beyond mere abstinence (not using the addiction) to actual recovery.

Recovery can be defined as regaining our best selves, regaining a personal closeness to God and beginning to be more like Him. King Benjamin's people found that because of their humility before God and

willingness to surrender their lives to Him, they had “no more desire to commit sin” (Mosiah 5:2). In Heart t’ Heart, this kind of mighty change of heart is our ultimate goal, building on the more immediate goal of stopping the detrimental, spiritually deadening addictive behavior.

I’ve heard of other recovery programs for addictive behaviors—even sexual addiction. What advantage is there in attending a specifically LDS recovery program?

In most Twelve Step programs, any reference to specific religious beliefs is avoided and “spirituality” is addressed only in generic terms that everyone can relate to. For example, God is referred to merely as one’s “Higher Power.” This democratic approach serves a purpose in those groups by avoiding inter-faith conflicts. However, many of us who are members of the Church have found it very difficult to avoid speaking plainly about “God as we best understand God”—in other words, about our Heavenly Father, the Savior Jesus Christ, or the Holy Ghost.

Also, there is much additional insight to be gained about the Twelve Steps from the perspective of the restored gospel and latter-day scripture. Not being able to refer to the scriptures or other gospel principles in meetings is a great handicap. In Heart t’ Heart, we have found it invaluable to meet with other Church members and friends to pursue recovery in an atmosphere of shared belief. This was, in fact, one of the primary reasons Heart t’ Heart was founded.

How long does it take to change?

Some of us have experienced miraculous bursts of insight, personal revelation and understanding that have created huge adjustments in our attitudes and beliefs almost overnight. Most of us, however, experience what A.A. calls the “educational variety” of change that comes from faithful, consistent attendance at our group meetings and study of gospel principles that correlate with the Twelve Steps.

It took time for us to develop these problems. It will take time to recover from them. We should not expect overnight perfection. The

healing process is a progressive one, building “line upon line,” moving from stage to stage, from level to level. It is not helpful to set a time limit or expectation on our journey, but rather, to get into the path and start moving. As soon as we start working the program—attending meetings, listening, reading literature, keeping a recovery journal—we find our lives start to change. Things get better as we keep working, and miracles happen—sometimes small and sometimes great.

Aren't there differences between sexual addicts?

There certainly are. How we got caught in the snare of sexual addiction and how far we've gone in this progressive illness are the basis of some definite external, “first glance” differences between us. Some of us came into sexual addiction by allowing the natural adolescent curiosity about sex to develop into an obsession or compulsion for private indulgence such as pornography and/or masturbation, perhaps as a coping mechanism for dealing with rejection, boredom, or low self-esteem. Others were forced into premature sexualization by another person only to find later that sex had become an obsession in their own life.

If unchecked, either of these pathways can lead to deeper and deeper desensitization—in other words, a deadening of one's conscience. For far too many, this downward spiral has led eventually to involving other people in illicit consensual sex acts, or even worse, to becoming a sexual perpetrator. The “progressive illness” of addiction has no more terrible worst case scenario than sexual abuse of the innocent. Our goal in Heart t' Heart is to help a person stop this degenerative process as early as possible, thereby avoiding greater heartache than has already been suffered.

How can Heart t' Heart help someone arrest sexual addiction?

By providing the following:

- a practical application of the principles of the gospel directed specifically at one's bondage to addiction
- fellowship with others who have experienced release from

this bondage and are living free of the addiction

- fellowship with others who want recovery enough that they are willing to participate in a group fellowship
- an accepting, simple atmosphere of listening and learning at one's own pace
- testimony and assurance that this is not a hopeless situation and there is a Power great enough to eliminate it from your life—even the power of the Savior's Atonement
- an atmosphere of hope, faith and change (recovery)

As we attend Heart t' Heart meetings, we listen to principles of recovery and to stories of people applying these principles in their lives. We meet people who are dealing successfully with the exact same weaknesses we have. Their success awakens in us something we had lost—hope for ourselves and our recovery. We come to believe that maybe we're not as unique or hopeless as we had been deceived into thinking we were.

As we become honest and admit our need for more than human power, we also learn to develop a relationship with the Savior. He is the One who turns our weaknesses to strengths as we go to meetings, learn the gospel principles encompassed in the Twelve Steps and apply them in our daily lives. We practice the principle of humility which gives the Lord access to our hearts so He can change them.

Does Heart t' Heart have groups that deal specifically with sexual addiction?

Yes. In Heart t' Heart we have *general* and *special focus* groups. In general focus groups, we meet together to address the reality of addiction in our own lives or in the lives of loved ones without getting specific about our particular addiction. These meetings can be very helpful because they give us the chance to experience first hand the similarities of every addicted person's struggles.

In a special focus group, people meet who are dealing with similar challenges—such as compulsive eating, overspending, codependency,

pornography addiction, etc.—to find recovery specific to their particular area of addiction.

Both approaches offer great advantages. Many of us who are willing and able to attend more than one meeting a week take advantage of both types of fellowship. In all of these groups, meetings include study of the scriptures and other approved literature, and sharing our “experience, strength and hope” as we work to implement these principles of change in our lives.

Are there limitations on what can be discussed in a sexual addiction group?

Absolutely! Our emphasis in Heart t’ Heart groups is on *recovery*, not on rehearsal of details about our experiences of acting out. None of us are professionals and we aren’t qualified to listen to or deal with explicit accounts of anyone’s past life. Furthermore, it is not helpful for members to talk about details of sexual temptations, whether acted on, fantasized about, or even those successfully resisted. We take care to keep our sharing appropriate and non-triggering. Heart t’ Heart meetings are designed to be safe places to share and find strength and hope. Talk that might add to our problems is obviously avoided. In sexual addiction groups, as in all Heart t’ Heart groups, the focus is on the *solution*, not the problem. We emphasize reliance on the Savior and invite the Holy Ghost to be present through our prayers and frequent inclusion of the scriptures in our meetings. These strong positive influences bring a spirit into our meeting that precludes explicit sharing.

Is it wise to have a group of sex addicts together in the same meeting?

We sometimes hear this question from those who have not suffered from a sexual addiction. We who have suffered in this way know that the implied fear behind the question is virtually groundless, and based on a serious, though innocent, lack of understanding of sexual addiction.

Most of us have found sexual addiction to be a very isolating disease. While adolescents have a natural curiosity about sex and many

may go through a juvenile stage of swapping jokes and ribald comments in high school locker rooms, adult sexual addiction is an unrelenting source of shame to those who are afflicted with it.

It is essentially unheard of that someone comes to Heart t' Heart to boast of their 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 and even admit this weakness to others. Once again, as mentioned earlier, the predominant use of scriptures, prayer, and self-examination in light of gospel principles sets a spiritual tone in our meetings. In this atmosphere, anyone attending the meetings with less than a sincere desire to change will probably not feel at home and will not come back. Our meetings create an atmosphere of motivation to eliminate unwholesome thoughts and actions, not to indulge them further.

In Heart t' Heart, sexual addiction recovery groups are either men's groups or women's groups, but not mixed. We recognize this is a conservative position to take, but we feel it is in keeping with our absolute commitment to the standards and teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

There isn't a Heart t' Heart group dealing specifically with sexual addiction in my area. Do I have any other options in Heart t' Heart besides a sexual addiction recovery group?

Yes, you do. As mentioned earlier, there are also general focus groups. If you are in an area with only general focus groups, you are more than welcome to attend one of these groups. There are actually advantages to meeting with people dealing with other addictions. Those of us who have attended such groups have been greatly blessed by the experience of relating to others and not feeling so unique in our mortal struggles.

When attending a general focus meeting, it is best to introduce ourselves in a generic way. We might say something like, "Hi. My name's John, and I am here to work on recovery from compulsive-addictive behavior in my life." Some of us have found that as we have continued to attend a general focus group and felt safe among the

regular members, and felt our own repentance process growing stronger, we've surprised ourselves with the ability to say aloud, "I'm John and I'm recovering from an addiction to pornography." Others in these general focus groups—men and women alike—have defined our honesty as courageous and admirable. It has worked miracles in helping us to let go of fear that we would be rejected by others if they knew the nature of our addiction. It is wonderful to be released from this fear! You will find that people generally respect your efforts to change. Sharing more information than this in a general focus meeting is not necessary to your recovery program. Let the Spirit guide you as you focus on the solution rather than the problem.

What about talking to my bishop?

As uncomfortable as it may be, confession to your bishop or stake president is a part of the repentance process. *Any* involvement in the behaviors of sexual addiction make this confession necessary, so the question is not *if*, but *when*. Our recommendation would be to speak to your bishop as soon as possible. Secrecy and fear are tools the adversary uses to keep us in bondage. As alcoholics in the A.A. program are fond of saying, "We are only as sick as we are secret." Confession to your bishop is an important step in the recovery process and the sooner it is done, the better.

Your bishop can also be one of you most valuable sources of help in recovery. Reporting your progress to him will give you someone to whom you can be accountable. He may want to help you as you work through the Twelve Steps, as they are steps of repentance.

Please counsel with your bishop about your worthiness to attend the temple. Attending the temple unworthily will not bring you blessings. Neither will staying away from the temple after you have sufficiently repented. Your bishop has the stewardship to determine when you are ready to attend the temple worthily.

What about telling my spouse?

Addicts tend to minimize the damage their addiction causes, but the truth is, sexual addiction is very hurtful to the spouse of the addict

even when the spouse is unaware of their partner's addiction. If the addict is a man, the wife and family suffer from the lack of a worthy priesthood holder in their home. A man's guilt usually makes him feel unworthy and dishonest when administering in the priesthood. For instance, he may avoid or minimize opportunities to give blessings. Addicts become pretenders and liars in many ways. They lie to cover up missing money and time they can't account for. These lies further erode their sense of integrity and self-worth. They often withhold affection from their spouse and children, becoming more irritable and short-tempered. Addicts tend to find fault with others to distract themselves from their own secret self-blame and self-loathing.

As sad as those consequences are, negative impacts on the spouse may not stop with emotional and verbal injustices. An individual who allows his or her addiction to lead to action, committing sexual acts with others, risks the health and even the life of both the addict and the spouse.

Therefore, the person who tells him or herself, "I don't want to tell my spouse about my addiction because I don't want to cause further pain or ruin our marriage," has been deceived by the adversary, who is the father of all lies. The truth is, much damage has already been done. Telling the spouse may bring more of that pain to the surface, but it is an important part of the repentance process. Participating in sexual addiction necessarily involves departure from complete faithfulness to one's spouse, and repentance cannot be completed without confession to the person wronged. We encourage each addict to seek the Spirit's guidance in considering the manner and time of this disclosure.

What else can I do to work my own sexual addiction recovery program?

Whether you have access to a sexual addiction recovery group or not, we would like to suggest the following:

- Get a copy of the workbook, *He Did Deliver Me From Bondage*, and deliberately set about working through the chapters and writing exercises. Be prayerful and invite the Spirit to teach you how to apply the principles of the steps

in your own life. As you write your thoughts and impressions in response to scripture-guided questions, you will find miraculous insights coming to you that will convince you that the Spirit of the Lord is leading you in your recovery work. We know. We have lived this miracle ourselves.

- If there is a Heart t' Heart group in your area, attend it. As mentioned earlier, be prayerful and observe proper discretion in sharing so others will not be made unnecessarily uncomfortable. Attend, listen, learn the principles and begin applying them to your own situations. Do everything you can to work your program in your daily life. Use the tools of recovery, such as prayer, scripture study and journal writing.
- Visit the Heart t' Heart website. Forums or discussion groups are available where you can discuss these principles with others who are using them. The website address is <http://www.heart-t-heart.org>.
- Read the recommended literature on sexual addiction recovery. *Sexaholics Anonymous* (the "White Book") is excellent.
- Consider starting a Heart t' Heart group in your area, either with a general focus, or one focusing specifically on sexual addiction. Heart t' Heart's General Service Office (see address on the back of this booklet) has materials available to help you start a group, including a pamphlet called "How to Start and Maintain a Heart t' Heart Group," which contains suggestions on where to meet and how to contact other members who may want to meet with you. We are always ready to offer any further help that may be needed.
- Other support groups are available, such as Sexaholics Anonymous. In some locations, SA groups exist that are oriented toward members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You will want to make sure the group you attend supports your standards and helps you to draw nearer to the Savior, as He is the source of recovery.

PART II.

TO THE SPOUSE OR LOVED ONE OF THE ADDICT

While the first part of this booklet was addressed primarily to the person suffering from sexual addiction, Part II is addressed to you, the spouse, fiancée or close loved one of the addicted person. As mentioned in the beginning of Part I, since the most common situation is for the addicted person to be male and their loved one to be a wife, we are going to use those designations and pronouns in this section. We have not been able to present the viewpoint of a husband with a sexually addicted wife because we haven't heard enough from these individuals. As we hear more of these stories we plan to present that perspective in a future version of this booklet. In the meantime, we encourage you to prayerfully adapt these comments to fit your needs.

When a spouse discovers the truth.

When the wife finally learns the truth about her husband's addiction—as almost always happens sooner or later—the injury she experiences takes on far deeper dimensions. Those of us who have experienced this most hated and unwanted of revelations have eventually come to appreciate that it marks the end of the uncertainty, the wondering and suspecting we may have experienced before we learned the whole truth about our husband's behavior. Still, while that terrible stage of not knowing for sure is finally over, now you must deal with the feeling of being devalued, betrayed and “cheated on,” even if the “other women” were flat, two dimensional images on a computer screen or in a video or magazine.

Perhaps the greatest harm you suffer is the most unfair—an almost inevitable feeling of self-doubt and personal inadequacy. Almost every wife of a man addicted to pornography or other sexual misbehavior feels that if somehow she were more attractive, more alluring, if she were

enough for him, then he wouldn't have to turn to these idealized, so-called perfect models. The tragic aspect of this reaction is there is no truth to it. It is a total lie. If you doubt that, consider this: If a man's satisfaction with his wife depended on physical attractiveness or sex appeal, we would expect that men married to super models and actresses would be the most faithful of husbands. But even the most cursory of glimpses into the world of fashion and movies quickly convinces us this is not so.

The truth is: *you are not the cause of your husband's addiction!* You must believe that it is not your fault, even if he tries to convince you otherwise. In most cases it began well before marriage, and contrary to the expectations of almost all of these men, marriage did not cure the addiction. You did not cause your husband's addiction. Neither can you control or cure it.

Then what is the cause of his addiction?

An addiction to sexual stimulation, like every other addiction, begins with unmet needs at a very deep *emotional* and, most significantly, *spiritual* level. We who have watched our husbands find recovery can testify to you that in every instance where our husbands have found lasting release from this bondage it has been through applying themselves to a spiritually focused program of recovery. Any addiction, including sexual addiction, is based on the addict's effort to compensate for or escape from deep, uncomfortable feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, regret or possibly sorrow. Eventually, though, the addiction turns on the addict and causes much deeper anguish and life-damaging consequences than his original problems did. What the addict thought to be a solution has now become his worst and most soul-searing problem.

How do I deal with my negative feelings towards my husband?

It will help to learn more about addiction in general and sexual addiction in particular. This can be done through reading some of the excellent literature available. It might also be a great advantage to you, if you can find the courage—and we *know* how much courage it takes—

to join a Heart t' Heart or other support group dealing with "codependency."

The word "codependent" has come to signify someone whose own mental, physical and spiritual life is being seriously affected by his or her relationship to an addicted person. Many people attend Heart t' Heart support groups to learn how to use the principles in the Twelve Steps to deal with the choices of their addicted loved one. Listening as others share their journey of growth and experience, of how the Lord has upheld them and guided them through situations similar to your own, can be an extremely powerful antidote to the fear and depression that can result from thinking you are alone with this challenge. You do not need to be alone. There are people who are willing to share their experience, as well as the strength and hope they have gained from learning and practicing the principles of recovery. One of the greatest blessings of participating in such a fellowship is you begin to feel the reassurance that *your spouse's choices are not about you personally*. You also learn how others are coping with the same feelings and reactions you are experiencing.

What can I do to help my spouse quit?

This is the question we hear more than any other from the spouses of addicts. Usually it is the wife, wanting to know "what can I do to get him to change?" Well, please reflect for a minute on what we said a few paragraphs ago about your powerlessness to *make* him stop. This is perhaps the most agonizing truth for the addict's spouse to accept. Nevertheless, just as the addict has to admit that *he* is powerless over his addiction, you must admit *you are too*. You are powerless to make him change. In fact, as paradoxical as it may sound, the harder you try to fight this situation, the worse it usually becomes. Why? Because, simply put, *it isn't your fight*. It isn't your effort that counts, that will make the difference *for him*.

We had to learn that it was not in our power to cause our husbands to change. Our husbands' healing had to come from their own willingness to turn to the Savior and do what it takes to establish a genuine relationship with Him. Only then can *He* lift this burden from

your husband. By the same token, the burdens *you* bear as a result of your spouse's addiction can only be lifted if you put your relationship with *the Lord* first.

Does that mean I can't do *anything* to help?

No, it doesn't. There are definitely some things you can do that will help this situation. As we have already emphasized, the *most important* thing you can do to help is let go of your husband's poor choices. Then begin making the correct choice of turning to the Lord for comfort and solace for yourself. It will *not* help to play detective or sleuth and try to find out your husband's every action. You can't manage another person's life that closely—and if you try, *you* will lose your own serenity and your own grip on life. The Lord doesn't ask us to become obsessed with another person's life.

If you suspect your husband is involved with illicit sexual activities, the best thing you can do is turn to God in prayerful humility. Seek Heavenly Father's guidance through the counsel of the Savior. If it is part of His will that you be an instrument in bringing your husband face-to-face with the reality of his choices, and if you are willing to be that instrument, we can assure you circumstances will bring that to pass. As you prayerfully consult with the Lord, you will be led to the proper actions. But in reality, the more responsibility you try to assume for your husband's behavior, the less responsibility he will feel for it. He may even rationalize his subsequent acting out by thinking "Well, she didn't stop me..." Or he may become resentful of your attempts to control him and act out just to prove he still has his agency.

But if I quit trying to help him, won't he just get worse?

This is another heart-wrenching reality of addiction recovery: He very well might get worse *for a time*. As we face these facts about agency and its supremacy as the governing principle of all salvation (Alma 29:4; D&C 88:32) and the sorrow and suffering it causes, we are learning for ourselves to appreciate the sorrow of Heavenly Father and the Savior for those who choose contrary to the great plan of happiness. Like them, we must exercise faith in the truth that no one ever has or

ever will find any lasting or true happiness in practicing wickedness. If the addict continues to pursue his addiction, his addiction will teach him what wickedness inevitably brings.

If you get involved in trying to manage his recovery, you will likely slow the process down. We who have lived through these dynamics ourselves have learned that the best thing we can do is turn to the Savior for the power to let go and step back and let this issue be where it is in eternal reality—between our husband and his need for a Savior. We are not able to save him. There is only *One* who can do that—Jesus Christ. Each of us had to accept this fact and realize that dumping our anger and pain on our spouse only complicated and distracted him, giving him excuses to avoid turning to the Lord.

But don't I get to say anything? I mean, this behavior of his feels like it's destroying me!

Of course it does, because it is threatening to destroy your hopes and dreams. To marry someone and believe and trust and expect a secure relationship with them is a core investment for a woman. Your pain is not to be ignored or minimized. This may sound like we are beginning to say the opposite of what we said just a moment ago about not dumping our anger on our husband. The clue here is in the word “dumping.” We learned by hard and sometimes long experience, that “dumping,” (i.e.: going into hysterics, crying, begging, ranting) was just so many fireworks that kept our husbands from facing the real enemy within their own souls.

The key for all of us was to turn to the Lord and find our own connection with His Spirit and guidance. In this connection we found the ability to tell our truth plainly and yet calmly to our husbands. The last thing you should do is “*stuff*” your own feelings. You need to deal with them *prayerfully*. We suggest you also counsel with your priesthood leaders and with others who have successfully weathered these same circumstances. You may perhaps also need to visit with professional counselors. And finally, you must express your feelings to your husband. He most definitely needs to know how his choices are affecting you and your feelings. Doing this is not the same thing as trying to control his

choices by force or threat. It is simply putting the truth out there so he can understand and begin to deal with it.

What if he ignores my feelings? He doesn't seem to care enough about them to stop now.

Let us state again the most basic reality of addiction. Addiction is *not* just a bad habit. Addiction is a terrifying degree of bondage at every level—physical, emotional and spiritual. We who have successfully weathered these terrible storms had to come to the realization that our husbands' ability to stop their addiction had absolutely nothing to do with their feelings for us. An addiction is not about love or lack of love for one's spouse. His inability to change right now is not an indication of whether he respects your feelings or not. He is an addict. That means that no matter how much he may want to change, and how good his reasons, he doesn't have the power. And the only place he can get that power is from the Savior. Having one of the best marriages in the world is not enough; being married to your best mortal friend is not enough to make an addict change. Only involvement with the Lord and His saving grace and power can create the power to change. The Savior must become your husband's best friend—and yours, as well.

Sometimes I just want to give up and leave him, but how can I? Isn't that deserting him?

How long to stay in a heartbreaking and traumatic relationship is something no one but the Lord can tell you. Remember how He answered Nephi's prayers for years with the counsel to stay in close relationship with his brothers, Laman and Lemuel, even through they were behaving in unrighteous and abusive ways towards him. But then came the day when the very same Lord told Nephi it was enough, that it was now part of His will for Nephi to take his family and separate himself from the close company of his brethren.

Knowing what to do and having the faith and courage to carry it out is something that ultimately you must seek and find in personal revelation. We admit, because we too have lived it, that this feels like performing heart surgery blindfolded. What do you do? On the one

hand, there's always the possibility your husband may be about to change, and your support may help him. On the other hand is the reality that many, if not most, addicts do not make a whole-hearted decision to seek real help until life gets devastatingly stressful. As long as an addict thinks he can have his addiction and everything else he values, too, he may never experience what has been termed "hitting a bottom." Sometimes, this crisis can be brought on by sincere, heart-deep talks with your husband. But all too often, nothing less than a wife insisting he leave their marriage bed or possibly even their home will bring about this degree of crisis.

The basic principle you must be guided by in this process is that you *cannot* decide what *he* will do—you can only decide what *you* will do. Your husband then must take your actions into account as the consequences of his behavior. He then will decide how he will respond, whether to seek help in changing or remain as he is until the pain becomes even greater. The saying is, "When the pain of the problem becomes greater than the pain of the solution, we will finally be ready to change."

Because these decisions have far-reaching implications, please be sure to counsel with others who can give you perspective and prayerful insights—your bishop and possibly family and trusted friends, if they themselves are prayerfully seeking the Lord's counsel in how to support you. *Above all*, we encourage you to seek the personal revelation you need by increasing your focus on personal application of scripture study, prayer, and temple attendance, if that is possible. Keeping a personal journal has been a powerful tool for most of us in helping us to sort out thoughts and feelings and record personal direction from the Spirit.

What if my husband's sexual addiction has begun to affect my sexual activities as well?

Sadly, addiction of any variety is often contagious. This is just as true of sexual addiction. Others who are closely related to an addict may become aware of his addiction and be influenced toward it themselves. While the most common example of this may be seen in a boy or young man being introduced to pornography by finding his

brother's, uncle's or father's secret "stash," it is not as uncommon as you might think for a wife to become involved in her husband's addiction, usually in a desperate attempt to find some way to feel intimate with and connected to her husband. This desire for closeness may contribute to a woman's willingness to lower her own standards and try to "save the marriage" by viewing pornography and acting out with her husband.

We who have lived through this terrible demoralization can testify to you that it is one of the deepest lies we can become enslaved by. May we plead with you to seek help immediately for yourself. Turn to the Lord first. Remember His mercy to the woman caught in the act of sexual sin, as well as towards the Samaritan woman at the well who was living in sin. The Savior has infinite patience and tenderness and is waiting for those who will come to Him. As quickly as you can, seek your bishop's help. No matter what your husband chooses, you must reach out to the Lord and His priesthood representatives for mercy. We can promise you there is repentance sufficient to find a complete healing and remission from even this pitiful situation. We must testify again, that just as with your husband, the only healing and freedom you will find will come when you allow the Savior to become the most important person in your life, the one whose love and approval is most important to you.

I have heard the term "sexual co-addiction." Does that mean to become caught up in acting out ourselves?

The expression "sexual co-addiction" (or "sexual co-addict") is actually used in at least two ways. Some use it to simply refer to a severely codependent spouse of a sex addict whose own life is being devastated and traumatized by their partner's addiction. In other cases, the term may be used to refer to a situation where the wife's own sexual behavior has been influenced by her husband's sexual addiction. We have tried to discuss both of these cases above. The significant thing is that in both cases—whichever one the term is being used to convey—the solution can be found in applying the Twelve Steps to facilitate a person's connection with divine power in order to repent and recover

for herself, regardless of her spouse's choices. These principles can literally restore us to possession of our own agency.

CONCLUSION

There is only One.

In conclusion, we would like to commend you, whether you are an addict or a loved one of an addict, for your willingness to seek out a Christ-centered solution for this crisis you are facing. We have every confidence that if you follow the principles of the gospel as expressed in the Twelve Steps, and strive to live a life close to the Savior, so He can help you day-by-day and minute-by-minute, you will find relief from the plague of sexual addiction. Our Lord loves you, and does not despise you because of the weakness you have. He wants to use that weakness to bring you to Him (Ether 12:27), where he can teach you the lessons He has in store for you. We urge you to take advantage of this great love. He wants you to come to Him. He is waiting for you. May God bless you in this very important journey.

Heart t' Heart's website and online forum may be found at:
www.heart-t-heart.org Additional copies of this booklet (Item #4103) and other Heart t' Heart materials may also be found there.

Copies of *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage* by Colleen Harrison may be purchased through Hearthaven Publishing, PO Box 31, Hyrum, UT 84319, at most LDS bookstores or online at: <http://www.shop.hearthavenpublishing.com/>

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