

HEALING A MARRIAGE AFFLICTED BY PORNOGRAPHY

# God's Opportunity

A WIFE'S  
PERSPECTIVE



ELIZABETH WELLS

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## **About the Author**

# I feel like I'm going crazy<sup>1</sup>

I couldn't form words when I first learned about Luke's relationship with pornography. We didn't consider at the time that it was an addiction, but we knew that whatever it was, it was harmful to us both. It was a darkness that consumed us.

I was about to leave for work when he told me he had been viewing pornography. He didn't tell me the full extent of it right then, but I felt like what he did tell me was all I could take.

I spent my whole nursing shift distracted by this huge weight now sitting on my chest. Small pieces of previous confusion started making sense. I had recently been feeling disconnected from Luke. He seemed emotionally unavailable and I didn't know why. I guess now I did.

## WHY IT HURTS SO MUCH

When a loved one has a habit of escape that causes disconnection, it affects their relationships with others. When viewing pornography is the habit, spouses are hurt in a unique way because it challenges almost every promise made at the altar. And when one is told that the habit is actually an addiction, and that times of viewing are relapses, hope is especially difficult to muster up. Any sense of control is trampled on, and powerlessness takes over.

After one of Luke's relapses in the early years of our marriage, I confided in my journal about the turmoil I was drowning in.

*This hurts on so many levels.*

*It hurts me as his wife and eternal companion. Luke made a sacred covenant with me, and part of that is being morally chaste, faithful, and true to me. He's supposed to protect me from pain, not cause it. When he looks at pornography, I feel forgotten by him.*

*It hurts me as his best friend. It's painful watching him hurt and struggle and be so angry with himself. I can tell he's hurting, and I feel powerless to stop it.*

*It hurts me as his partner in intimacy. It's supposed to be just me and him exploring the world of sex together—not me without him or him without me or us with anyone else. If intimacy is engaged in outside the two of us, I feel like it degrades what we have. It makes our intimacy not*

*as special, not as safe, not as secure, and not as needed. Part of my privilege as his wife is that I get to be the one to meet his needs in that way and vice versa. I don't want him to look elsewhere. It used to make me feel good that I was the only girl Luke had seen and known in that way; I was the only one who could make him feel those things, or so I thought. It's hard to feel like he really doesn't need me for any of that.*

*It also hurts on a spiritual level. Watching him distance himself from the Lord is scary. What does this mean for our eternal life together? What does this do to the validity of our covenants? What does this mean for the spiritual protection in our home? It's also so heartbreaking because I want him to feel the peace and happiness of being close to the Lord. I want him to feel confident before Him always, and I can tell that He doesn't. What will this lead to? Will he leave the Church?*

## A STORM OF EMOTIONS

With time and frequent relapses, the initial numbness and shock turned into an array of emotions. I was angry. Sad. Optimistic. Hopeless. Hopeful. Self-conscious. Annoyed. Disappointed. Confused. Frustrated. Lonely. In denial. Anxious. Disgusted. Depressed. Over-sexual. Under-sexual. Rejected.

Because of the frequency of relapses, it felt like explosions kept going off before I could get my footing. It took a very long time for me to be able to organize, label, and process my feelings. I can put my experience into words now, but at the time, it felt like pure chaos.

Sometimes I would stay in an emotion for days or weeks. Other times I would go back and forth between emotions, one day feeling one and the next feeling another. Usually, though, I would feel a lot of things all at once or switch between them in a matter of minutes.

At times I wanted to know everything about Luke's behavior and choices. Other times I wanted to know nothing. I went through periods of trying to control every little part of his recovery efforts, and I went through periods of being completely apathetic to him and his recovery. I would also go between feeling hyper-sexual—which was very confusing to me—and having an intense distaste toward anything remotely related to sex.

I honestly felt like I was going crazy. The only pattern I ever noticed was that there was no pattern at all. I was completely at the mercy of whatever emotion overcame me at any given time. How long it would last and how intensely I would feel it was anyone's guess.

## THEY AREN'T COMING OUT OF NOWHERE

The difficulty was that I couldn't put a name to any of my emotions, and neither could Luke.

I'm not sure who was more confused by my seemingly irrational behavior, me or him. I can remember getting overly annoyed that he didn't put the cereal box away one morning, not realizing that the root of my frustration was that he looked at pornography again. Or, when we later had kids, my anger with his choices would sometimes be displaced onto the kids through yelling at them for little things.

One reason it was hard to trace these feelings back to Luke's pornography viewing in the moment was because my thoughts and feelings surrounding a relapse could resurface long after it actually happened. Being annoyed about the cereal box could be weeks after he told me he relapsed. It all depended on how long the initial shock, denial, and numbness lasted before the array of emotions came on.

Most times we both would think we had moved on from the damage of a choice he had made, but in reality, I hadn't. The unhealed pain that was pushed down deep inside bubbled back up at the oddest times and in the strangest ways. What was happening to me? Was I going crazy? It really did seem like it.

## 2 *I feel alone and want to hide*

For the longest time throughout our marriage, I was on an emotional roller coaster. During every up, down, twist, and turn, one thing remained constant: I felt alone. Despite not wanting to feel this way, I hid from everyone, especially in the days and weeks following one of Luke's relapses.

I could feel the conflict within, and it made me feel even more like I was going crazy. No one consistently reached out to me with comfort and support, but how could they when barely anyone even knew? And if they did know about Luke's "addiction," they certainly didn't know how often he relapsed and what a huge part of our lives this problem was.

I thought no one would understand or even want to. Who could blame them? Everyone was having their own trials—why burden them with mine?

I knew that my Savior Jesus Christ understood. I tried to lean on Him daily. But the negativity and numbness that clouded most days masked His presence in my life. I clung to the moments when my pain was penetrated by the comforting presence of the Holy Ghost, allowing His light to break up the smoke and chaos of an explosion. Those moments kept me going, but they felt far less often than I needed.

I hated feeling so alone. A part of me, though, wanted to keep it that way. It's scary letting people in. There were times I did reach out but then quickly discovered the pain of sharing this part of my life with the wrong people. So I learned how to avoid the damaging sympathy from those who didn't know what to say: Just don't tell anyone.

Even if I wasn't socializing with the intention of sharing what I was going through, I still didn't want to be around anyone. It was overwhelming to pretend like everything was okay. Most days I didn't even have it in me to give my voice a cheerful tone.

So I stayed in. I didn't answer my phone. I barely responded to texts. I isolated myself and withdrew. It fed my loneliness but seemed a small price to pay to avoid the stress of socializing while having open, gaping wounds that people didn't know how to respond to.

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