

Jeff 2003

I grew up in a Christian family that was often rigid and very perfectionistic. While I was never physically abused, humiliation both privately and publicly was commonplace. After a particularly painful and very public humiliation by my Mother, I vowed that I would never again be hurt like that. I withdrew from my family and friends and have had difficulty connecting with people ever since. I am one of those people that my pastor talked about a while ago that has a sign around my neck that says, "Don't get too close." I became skilled at appearing very friendly on the outside, but knowing exactly how close to let a person get to me before I backed off. Little did I realize that my self-imposed isolation would do more damage than the pain I had hoped to avoid.

I was 13 when I discovered pornography while attending a friend's Bar Mitzvah party. All the boys in attendance went wild over the Playboy magazines supplied by my friend's dad. It seemed to be a harmless activity and was a great way to avoid dealing with the reality of my life. What I saw as a "guy thing" however quickly and powerfully began to take over my life.

In the following years, my use of pornography grew substantially. For many years I tried over and over to stop, promising myself that I would never do it again, but all my attempts failed. I prayed to God that he would take away my cravings, but He knew that I was not fully ready to give him command of my life, especially since I was doing such a terrific job at it. Much later, I thought that my "problem" would vanish when I married my wife, I was wrong. As my habit continued to worsen, I increasingly became disconnected with God as well as my wife. A few years ago, I nearly had an affair with a woman and our marriage barely survived after my wife confronted me and suspected that I was already having an affair. Only the great love from my wonderful wife and God's wisdom saved our marriage.

Only in the last few years have I seen that my visits to adult bookstores, strip clubs and later Internet web sites as an addiction. After trying and failing many, many times to get control of my problem by myself, did I realize that I my addiction to pornography was controlling me, not the other way around. My life looked good on the outside, but actually was a phony front with a dark and hidden secret. I was living the perfect Christian life: attending my church every week, involved in a Bible study and viewing pornography constantly. This awareness put me in a tailspin of shame and depression. Over time I began to avoid dealing with my day-to-day responsibilities and my professional life also suffered. I took increasingly poor care of myself and even became suicidal. I finally understood how my entire life had been compromised by my addiction and yet it was still getting worse and deep down inside I really did not want to stop.

My wife confronted me when she discovered that I was on an Internet sex site. It was terribly embarrassing and once again put a strain on our marriage. The fact was, that even though I knew that I had to stop, I didn't have any idea how to do it since I had tried and failed so many times before. Finally in desperation, I had enough and was ready to ask God to take charge of my life.

Shortly after that night, while listening to Chuck Smith on the radio, a caller asked him where a sex addict should go for help. Chuck suggested that he meet with the pastors at his own church and have them pray for him. The next day I left for Houston on a business trip. Shortly after arriving I found Clear Creek Community Church and discovered that the pastors and elders were meeting in a few minutes, but they told me that that had no openings that night. Apparently, they had not read God's calendar because only a few minutes later I was invited to meet with the Senior and executive pastors as someone had canceled their appointment. I admitted my sins and asked for prayer and guidance. They put hands on me and prayed for me. It was a very powerful, exciting and emotional turning point for me, which began a series of events that changed my life. They recommended that I look for a group at my home church as soon as possible.

When I returned home, I called my church and they told me about the Operation Integrity group. It was scary and very uncomfortable to attend for the first time, but I was amazed and impressed with the honesty and openness exhibited by these men. They were not judgmental, but were kind, wise and courageous enough to admit their own sins about subjects that are never discussed by men. The fact is that I had never met any men ever who were willing to talk on a deep level and be totally transparent about who they really were. Each shared their own stories and experiences working the 12 steps. All this time I had thought that I was the only one who had this problem. Much to my amazement, every one had some part of their story that I could relate to.

God started working immediately on me took away my depression right after making I committed to attend the OI group. After years of being haunted by depression, I woke up one morning and I knew something was different. My depression was gone and has never returned. Later when I confessed the ugly details of my sins to the group, the shame I felt was gone too.

Each Thursday our group works through the 12 steps, which feels like a combination of an IRS tax audit and a rectal exam. It is both difficult and embarrassing, but the only thing that has changed my life in the area of sexual integrity. By working these steps and these steps working me, God has taught me much;

- 1) I have learned that addiction is an escape from dealing with reality.
- 2) I have learned that sobriety begins with humbling yourself before God.
- 3) I always thought that God's requirement of confessing of our sins to one another was a chore that we had to do to be good Christians. The reality is

that confession is for us, that we benefit. God already knows what we have done and has forgiven us. When I confess my sins, the shame that drives me deeper into my addiction is removed.

- 4) I have learned that isolation increases the power of my addiction.
- 5) I have learned that every time I say no to my addiction, it loses some of its power.
- 6) I have learned Sobriety is a gift from God, and is not a result of my efforts.
- 7) I have learned that every time that I take a leap of faith and trust God; He blesses me in some noticeable and significant way.
- 8) I have learned recovering addicts are the most blessed people of all because we experience the full measure of God's grace through our sobriety.
- 9) Addiction is all about me, Recovery is all about God

Today, my 9 years gift of sobriety is more about closeness with God as opposed to not acting out in my addictive patterns. I am discovering that the closer I am to God, the farther I get from my addictions. My life is far from perfect and I still struggle with temptations. Sometimes my sobriety is not about surviving weeks or months, but days or even hours. God has blessed me powerfully and I now live a life of true joy that other people can see in me.

I used to be depressed, and now I am excited about my life and my future. I used to feel constant shame, but now I feel almost constant joy. I used to wonder whether miracles really happened, and now I live a miracle every day and see miracles in the lives of the men in my OI group every week. I used to be distant from God, but I am now closer to him than at any point in my life. I used to be terrified that someone would find out about my secret, but here I am telling all of you my story.

A lot has changed, and the best is yet to come.