

Hope after porn

*4 women share their stories of heartbreak...
and how their marriages were saved.*





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Foreword

The Hope Beyond Betrayal

The following stories are written by women who have personally known the devastation pornography can cause in a marriage. They give us a glimpse of the betrayal, the hurt, and the choices they made to try and make a difference.

These women open a window to their lives. Without the benefit of hindsight, they stumbled or deliberately walked to places where recovery could grow and hope could flower. These are their stories speckled with the messy details of addiction.

Today, as Internet access has become more common, pornography has only become more prevalent. According to American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, over half of divorce cases today involve one party having an obsessive interest in Internet porn. More and more men withdraw from real intimacy with their wives and into digital worlds of fantasy. This is not merely a statistically significant problem. It is a heartbreaking problem.

These stories are not meant as guides, but as living examples. As devastating as pornography can be for a couple, there is hope. There is hope for the women who feel betrayed and broken. There is hope for wives who feel they have tried everything. There is hope for the men who can't seem to stop their digital voyeurism. There is hope for the husbands who don't even seem to care.

There is hope.

Our Marriage Would Never Be the Same



(Laura's Story)

It couldn't have happened at a worse time.

After the trauma of preterm labor, a month of bed-rest, and a three-day long delivery, I was a new mom who had to constantly hold, nurse, or pump milk for our premature daughter. The around-the-clock care didn't ease up after the first couple of weeks like they said it would. I was so exhausted that I felt delirious. You might know the feeling.

To top it all off, I could tell our marriage was strained and I felt compelled to check my husband's computer. I knew that in the past, when I had been sick, weak, or occupied with something else, Ryan would struggle more intensely with pornography. We had been going around and around with this problem for the full three years of our young marriage. No amount of disappointment, hurt, anger, conviction, or counseling had solved the problem. The solutions we had tried only lasted until the temptation crept up again. I ignored the internal warning several times. I felt too drained to admit that Ryan might be looking at pornography while I was caring for the baby or enjoying any moments of sleep that came my way. I thought, *I can't take care of another person's problems; he's supposed to be strong for me.*

And yet the prompting continued. *Check your husband's computer.*

When I finally scanned the history on Ryan's computer, I found some images that he had recently viewed. Even though I wasn't surprised, I did feel freshly hurt and betrayed. I felt the familiar rush of jealousy, of wanting to look intently at every two-dimensional woman to discover what she had that I didn't have, what she did that I didn't do, or what she was that I couldn't be. I clenched my jaw and set my heart in disgust towards my husband: my heart was filled with bitterness toward this man who wasted our time, energy, and resources on lust while I worked so hard to take care of our family.

Making a Crisis Out of It

I held our precious baby in my arms as I sat at our kitchen table and wondered what I should do next. Then it dawned on me, *Why should I sit here with a pit in my stomach*

while he waltzes through the day without a care in the world? I picked up the phone. When Ryan answered, I simply said, “You need to stop looking at pornography.” I knew that he could hear the finality in my voice; I knew that somehow, he got the message that I would not fight this losing battle anymore. I wanted him to sweat this one out. I wanted to make a crisis out of this so that it would not be a part of our lives anymore.

Five minutes later, Ryan pulled into the driveway and gushed every apology and every “I’ll try harder” he could concoct in an effort to appease me. I had heard it all before. I told him that unlike the past, I would not offer suggestions, solutions, or sympathy. The pattern had always been the same: when I initiated a solution, he never followed through. This time, *he* had to figure something out that would actually change the pattern. And he had to figure it out *himself*. I decided to retreat with our daughter to my parents’ home. I needed time and distance to heal, rest, and consider my appropriate response. I needed my mother and my sisters, who would help me to take care of the baby, and I needed a good night’s sleep.

Tears streamed down my face as I packed my bags. In my flurry of mourning and moving, I knew I would not return to the same man. I knew that our marriage would never be the same. It was either time for me to end the relationship or time for both of us to change. By going to my parents’ home, I knew I was making a risky move. Once a woman is married, she’s wise to keep healthy boundaries between her relationship with her husband and her relationship with her immediate family. But this particular time, I needed their physical help. My parents wanted to see us work it out; they weren’t coddling me or damning Ryan. They knew that he had walked through some tough times with me, and that I could walk through this with him.

What made the situation even more powerful were the friends who came to our rescue.

The Making of a New Man

For 40 days after my discovery of Ryan’s ongoing struggle—while I got over my initial desire to *kill* him—Ryan lived with our friend, Mark, and his family. Mark spent *hours* with Ryan—at the breakfast table, under the stars by the fire pit, on the porch, on the phone, etc.—asking him all of the tough questions, kicking his behind, and teaching him how to be an honest man. Every morning, Mark would remind him that, in order to love me and our children well, he had to “die to himself.” This meant giving up every selfish, immature notion and behavior and replacing them with sacrificial love. Tough stuff.

Another dear friend (also named Mark) joined in the battle and helped Ryan to see the character qualities that weakened a man’s resolve against lust. They also taught him how to grow in the virtues that would help him to be faithful, wise, and honest. “The Marks” (as we came to call them) didn’t overlook anything. They noticed and jumped

on parts of Ryan's personality and perspective that I wouldn't have had the discernment or courage to address. Men seem to have a special knack for nailing each other. To this day, I don't know all of the details that went on as the Marks beat Ryan down and built him back up again, but I do know that we will always tell our children and our children's children about the friends who did the hard work of instilling manliness and goodness in Ryan.

All this time, I too was being helped and counseled by two dear friends. They provided sympathy and support, but they also gave me a lot of wisdom about ways in which I could be more supportive, respectful, and loving towards Ryan. I hadn't noticed that I was behaving more like the "mother" and the "maid" rather than the "wife." I also hadn't noticed that while I was stressed with pre-term labor and bed-rest, everything else had fallen on Ryan's shoulders: cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking, yard work, preparing the nursery, and so on. Ryan insists that this is not an excuse—and I agree—but I sure didn't respect the fragility of a tired man. My friends pointed out that we had stopped going to church and hadn't seen our friends in many weeks. Since then, being closely connected to a local church and being vibrantly committed to God and the Bible have actually been *huge* factors in our kindness and faithfulness to one another.

Finding Real Accountability

Once Ryan and I were speaking again, we shared the important lessons we had learned. Ryan told me about the power of being accountable to other men. Although Ryan firmly believes that he ultimately answers to God, it sure helps to be open and honest with friends who agree that pornography is destructive and who want the best for him. He told me that he had downloaded Covenant Eyes Accountability software on all of our computers and that a small group of men he trusted would receive full reports of all his online activity. Until this point, I had been the one looking over Ryan's shoulder and "catching him" from time to time. It was exhausting, not to mention humiliating. Now that his friends were by his side, I could step back and allow Ryan to develop his own internal passion to resist temptation. You can imagine my relief.

My husband's career is in technology and he works on the computer every day. He says that after a life-long addiction to pornography, working on the computer is like a recovering alcoholic walking around with a flask of vodka all day, every day. Quite honestly, having Covenant Eyes on his computers has been a wonderful encouragement to him as he sets his mind to avoid pornography. Covenant Eyes is so helpful in making him think ten times about his online choices. His friends ask him hard questions about his Internet reports, and they've developed very deep relationships because of it. I've come to appreciate Ryan's willingness to protect our marriage with this software tool.

I still remember one afternoon during the restoration process when a friend challenged me to tell Ryan that I respected him and to specify why. She said it would probably mean the world to him and put some wind in his sails. That evening, I thought

about what I could possibly say. Finally, I blurted out, “I respect you for taking this so seriously.” I was shocked that I had come up with something on the spot. I was even more shocked that I actually meant what I said: I *did* respect the way that Ryan seemed to be investing his full heart into the restoration process. I respected the way he was being honest and doing whatever it took to regain my trust. When Ryan heard my words, his face lit up with a grateful smile as he said, “Thank you. I *am* taking this seriously. I love you.”

Your Marriage is Worth It

It’s been seven years since that dramatic crisis that required many, many changes in our marriage. Maybe someday I’ll write a book about it all. But for now, I want to come along your side and encourage you. If pornography is a part of your life, you are worth its removal, once and for all. Don’t tell yourself that it’s not so bad; don’t try to overlook the offense; don’t use it to justify your own bad habits. Your hurt feelings are completely valid. Pornography is insidious and destructive. No one is exempt from its effects and no one can handle it well. When you married your husband, you both vowed to “forsake all others.” When that vow is broken, hearts break, too.

Your husband is also worth its removal. When a man walks in daily victory over pornography, he literally becomes a different man. His face, body, and stature become more manly than ever. His voice, attitude, and outlook lighten and brighten. He experiences true and contented manhood because he doesn’t have to lie about his time, struggles, or character. You might be furious at your husband right now, but take a moment to catch a vision for the man he could be without the perversion of pornography weighing him down.

Do not be afraid to take action: exercise tough love and take a firm stand against pornography in your marriage.

Do not be afraid to let the light shine on your marriage, even if it is embarrassing, uncomfortable, or frightening. In fact, the blazing light is a *good* sign: it means that God is near and that He is at work in your lives.

You have every reason to believe that once pornography is removed, you will be a new woman with a new marriage to a new man.

Laura Booz is the author of *Blogger Behave* and the founder of TheHomeschoolBaby.com, an online community for mothers of the littlest learners. She and her husband Ryan live on a farm in Pennsylvania with their three children. She and her family enjoy homesteading, homeschooling, and ministering to their community. She blogs at 10MillionMiles.com.



Adultery of the Heart From Fantasy to Reality



(Nicole's Story)

*I'm gonna sing this song
To let you know that you're not alone
And if you're like me you need hope, coffee, and melody
So sit back down, and let the world keep spinnin' round
Yesterday's gone and today is waiting on you to show your face.*

- Robbie Seay Band, "New Day"

When I first listened to the words of this song, they were like water rushing in to my parched, tired spirit. I felt as if the words were meant for me: I needed to know I wasn't alone. I needed someone to give me hope for my troubled relationship. I needed someone to tell me all the yesterdays of my marriage were behind me and there was hope for today. But one day my husband's infidelity—online and offline—brought me to a breaking point. I finally made a decision to travel a path I never thought I would walk down: I took my sons and left my husband and our home.

The Losing Battle

I discovered pornography on my fiancé's and my computer three weeks before my wedding day. We weren't living together, but he was over to my house frequently. I grew up in a pretty conservative home with an idealistic vision of marriage and finding porn on our computer was quite shocking to me. When I confronted Jon about it, he was embarrassed to be found out. He told me it was something he could easily control, and promised me he'd get rid of it and that it wouldn't be something he'd engage in again. We both believed those words, convinced that wedded bliss would solve the issue. We loved each other deeply, and I wanted to trust him.

Over the years, I began to see some behaviors in Jon I was concerned about. He grew increasingly close to female friends with whom he volunteered at our church, and some of the relationships made me uncomfortable. In addition, I continued to discover porn on our computer. A well of fear and desperation led me to confront Jon about

these activities. At first he denied them. He had explanations for *everything* I found, and I wanted to believe everything he told me. Yet, something didn't quite add up, and I would push him until he acknowledged that he had in fact visited the porn sites. This led to seeds of distrust from the very beginning of our marriage—not only my distrust of him, but of myself and my instincts.

Jon is intelligent and quick-thinking, able to make swift decisions well, but also able to spin a confrontation to his advantage. He was quick to turn the conversation into issues that I struggled with, issues that had nothing to do with the Internet. Verbally, he came out on top almost every time. It would take several “rounds” of me bringing the issue up to get real resolution, but both of us walked away damaged.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Eventually, I found myself seeking a counselor for us. The distrust between us was a growing chasm, and we became two individuals just living in the same home. I wanted to have someone “neutral” help me verbalize to him what was so hurtful about his actions. We were stuck emotionally in our marriage, often more angry with each other than not. I knew from my parents’ example this didn’t need to be the way marriage was, but I didn’t know what to do to fix it and wanted help.

I also started understanding what it is that leads people to wanting divorce...I didn’t want that for us, but I was in so much pain emotionally, if he wasn’t willing to work on it with me, I was pretty sure we would end up going in that direction. Looking back, I see that I was giving myself emotionally to my girlfriends, my work, and my extended family, and with each confrontation about the Internet or a female friendship that set off red flags, I just slowly shut Jon out and didn’t give him access to the depths of my heart.

I convinced Jon to attend counseling sessions with me, and for a while, things got better. It felt like we were on the road to healing, one small step at a time. Jon didn’t want a divorce any more than I did. He’d grown up in a broken home and certainly didn’t want to repeat the cycle.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before his old behaviors started to surface again. I would wake up at 2 a.m. to find his side of the bed empty, our office door closed, and the glow of the blue screen coming from under the door. He was repeatedly home late, sometimes one or two hours later than what he’d originally told me he’d be home. He held hushed conversations on his cell phone downstairs, and then told me I was overreacting when I’d ask him about it. On weekends, he’d go out with “some people from work” and not get home until 5 or 6 a.m. Every behavior had a defensive but easy explanation whenever I asked about it.

The Downward Spiral to Adultery

By this time, we had three young sons, fairly close in age. I was incredibly concerned for the legacy our relationship was giving them. I went back to counseling alone...Jon didn't want to come with me. It was through those sessions that I realized that besides physical adultery, there was such a thing as *emotional* adultery. I also learned that I'd lost my trust in my woman's intuition. I started realizing that I needed to take some sort of action, but I didn't know what or how.

Finally, with the help of some members of my family, I did some digging to find out just how deep his sexual indiscretions went. Jon was so skilled at creating a smoke-and-mirrors lifestyle. We were blown away by what we found. I became convinced Jon was having an affair. His addiction to pornography was spiraling out of control. His need for attention from other women had moved beyond the fantasy world of pornography and into real life.

The Calculated Move

As I said, I was concerned for the legacy of the lives Jon and I were leaving for our sons. I believed Jon's behavior was harmful to them emotionally and spiritually. I didn't doubt for a second that he loved them—I absolutely knew that he did—but he wasn't willing to see how his behavior was harmful to me or them. I believe I needed to act on behalf of them. I also realized I needed to take a stand for what I knew was wrong. I loved Jon, but I'd been enabling him for years. It became clear that the many conversations, arguments, and threats of leaving weren't making a dent, and with each confrontation, Jon just got smarter at learning how to hide his behavior.

With the support of family and friends, I made the decision to take our boys and leave him and our home, without his prior knowledge. Given Jon's personality, his verbal abuse, and the individualistic life we'd created together, I felt this was the best option. One Friday morning, 15 people showed up to support me and transfer the boys' and my personal possessions from our home into a van and a U-Haul truck. I left him enough money in the bank to pay the bills for a month, a bed with a blanket, some furniture, and food in the refrigerator. I wasn't interested in revenge or hurting him, but this was a calculated move on my part to take a stand. I also left him a note, telling him that I believed he'd broken our wedding vows emotionally and physically, and that I'd contacted a divorce lawyer.

That changed everything.

I fully expected that my life would completely change. Emotionally, financially, and mentally, I started to prepare myself for being a single mom. What I didn't expect was Jon's reaction.

Freedom in Honesty

Finding our house empty forced him to confront all the lies he'd been telling me, others, and especially himself. He hit rock bottom emotionally, and went searching for me and the boys. Eventually, he ended up at my grandparents' home. When they opened the door, he broke down and confessed everything to them. For the very first time, he was completely honest about everything in his life and who he had become.

His honesty with my grandparents led them to contact me. I decided to put a hold on the divorce, and agreed to meet with him two weeks later with my grandparents facilitating. He confessed to me all of the betrayal, including the pornography addiction, emotional affairs, and physical affairs. I admit, I was defensive and had many, many questions for him. I was concerned with it being all an act, but then he told me that whether or not I'd take him back, he was initiating his own long-term changes and accountability.

When he and I met he had already connected with a leader of a men's sexual addiction accountability group. He said he was also willing to respect my healing process and really work towards re-establishing the trust between us. In addition, he'd set up an appointment on his own for himself with the counselor he'd refused to see previously. The fact that he was doing it for himself, and had initiated it himself, spoke volumes to me.

He also researched Internet accountability programs and chose Covenant Eyes, which would monitor his computer and send a report of all his Internet activity to some of our trusted friends and myself. Jon is more technologically inclined than I, so it made me nervous to have him be the one to choose the program and its settings. But after hearing him explain the program in detail and then receiving my first Internet report, I was impressed and could clearly see how it would be an excellent tool to help us rebuild trust concerning the computer in our home. Having multiple sets of eyes, other than mine, viewing Jon's activity on the Internet was helpful in two ways: it gave him the motivation to consistently make good choices on the computer, and took the pressure off my mind and heart of wondering whether or not he was being truthful in that particular area.

That day when I met with him at my grandfather's house, I could see Jon was clearly a broken man. He worked hard to re-establish trust between us. We had many, many difficult conversations in the weeks following the first meeting and both had to acknowledge that healing our marriage and our home would take a lot of work and a lot of time. For the sake of our boys, and because I knew Jon loved me, I agreed to work towards reconciliation between us. He did everything I asked of him, and more. It was hard for him to be completely vulnerable and honest, but he was. In addition to his one-on-one counseling sessions, participation in a sexual-addiction accountability group, and confession conversations with multiple people he'd hurt, he and I both went to counseling together.

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As I write this, we approach the three-year anniversary of me moving back home with the boys and living together as a family again. The path of healing for us has not always been easy. Jon and I both would like it if the emotional process wasn't so unpredictable. Healing in one area inevitably leads to knowing there are other areas that need attention, and honestly, it's physically tiring. But the accountability measures we've put in place act as amazing trust-builders. Even after all of that—and knowing there may be more trials to come—I can honestly say that *it is worth it*.

Nicole Meengs is a recovering perfectionist who loves being a wife, a mom to three boys, and keeping her foot in the door of the professional working world. She lives with her husband Jon in Michigan. Saturdays in the fall you will likely find her listening to or watching University of Michigan football, making applesauce, and eating chocolate at the same time. She's passionate about being authentic, keeping family time a priority, being an intentional mom, and living a prayerful life.



Gasping For Air, Hungry for Grace



(April's Story)

I met Darren at the young age of nineteen. My mom had just moved us to a new town after her 32-year marriage ended in divorce from my father—a man who was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive. Darren was older than me, and came from a tight-knit family. But most importantly Darren could make me laugh. Darren is funny—you know—that sarcastic-Ben-Stiller funny. I fell in love with him from day one.

We married in 1993 and moved away from our families in St. Louis so Darren could attend Dallas Theological Seminary. I was so excited to see him get prepared to do church ministry. It gave me a sense of safety knowing that I was married to a good man who wouldn't hurt me like the men in my family had done. Darren and I were best friends, we did everything together, and we both loved it.

The Night of Discovery

One rainy, October night I was home alone and Darren was in one of his classes. I'm not sure why I looked at the history on our computer: I guess I wanted to prove my gut instinct wrong. What I saw that night changed me forever—it changed me as a person, as a woman, and as a wife. I scrolled through hundreds and hundreds of websites that proved to me that my “godly” husband was just as broken as all the men in my family. I had two choices: to accept that fact, or to try to force him to change.

I don't even remember driving in the rain those 40 miles to his school. I just remember walking up to the classroom door in my pajamas and the look in his eyes that said he knew he'd been found out. At first he lied, then he apologized, then he said he'd never do it again. No one wanted to believe that more than me. I didn't want anyone to know that my marriage wasn't perfect. I didn't want anyone to know that Darren was looking at women in this way. Something inside of me said, “April, boys will be boys. He's been caught now. It's over. Let's laugh and joke and get back to your great marriage. You don't want to live life like your parents, do you? Holding grudges, silent treatments—that's not you. Just move on and put it all behind you.” And so I did...for eight more years.

Blaming Myself

Each time I caught him he got better at hiding it. Each time I caught him I died a little more on the inside. My respect for him was dying, too. We were both hiding who he really was because neither one of us wanted to face the truth, albeit for different reasons. My reason was pride. At the end of the day, I didn't want anyone to judge me, my husband, or my decisions. I didn't understand that Darren had been addicted to pornography since he was 13 years old. (He used to sneak into his neighbors' basement next door to look at his magazine collections when they were gone.) I didn't understand the scope and magnitude of the problem. In fact, I thought his problem was because of *me*. I was the one from the troubled home with all the baggage. Maybe if I was skinnier or taller or blonder or more endowed he wouldn't need to do this anymore. I honestly believed that I was the damaged one. I spent those 10 years trying to change for him, trying again to meet his needs in every way. Surely, I could find the combination or the cure that would get rid of this issue forever.

The problem was that Darren wasn't on board with my plan. He was sorry that he had been caught each time, but he was never truly repentant. I'd ask him to go to counseling with me, and he would go once and say, "That guy's a quack," and never return. He knew how to make me laugh about it to forget, and I desperately wanted to laugh and forget. So each time, I did just that: forget. No one knew: not my family, no one at church, no close friends, nobody. We never talked about these types of issues. I even remember calling a Christian radio talk show and just crying to the person who fields the calls. I was so brokenhearted, but I wanted to remain anonymous. I wore that smile and laughed at all the jokes, and no one could have ever imagined the darkness that was overtaking me daily.

Added to all of this, Darren and I had been dealing with infertility for six years. This brought a lot of stress on our relationship and only added to my feelings of inadequacy.

The best way to explain how I felt is to think of those scenes in a movie where a person is in a cave, it's filling with water, and she only has a small pocket of air to breathe between the water and the rock ceiling. I should have reached out to someone and shared how I was feeling. I should have talked to my mom or my pastors...someone. But I didn't.

"Tell Me You Don't Want Me to Go"

Then one day, after 11 years of marriage, something in me snapped. I had caught him again, but this time it was as if a little flame inside my heart had been blown out. I had no emotion, no tears, no pity, no sympathy. I only felt cold and blank.

I packed my things to go on a business trip. Darren would always drive me to the airport when I was traveling on business so when he dropped me at the curb, I turned to him and told him that I was leaving him. I remember the look of anger and frustration in his eyes as he asked me, "What do you want from me, April?"

As I stood on the curb I bent down to the open car window and said, “I want you to get out of the car and grab me and tell me you don’t want me to go!” After a long, pregnant pause he just looked at me from the driver’s seat and said, “Whatever!” That was his response. Whatever.

In that moment, on the curb at the airport, I was forced to surrender to the fact that I couldn’t change Darren, and Darren wasn’t willing or able to change on his own. I was forced to surrender to the fact that he was no different than all of the other men that had abused me in the past. As much as I needed that from him, I had to face the cold hard fact that I couldn’t change him.

Freedom in Community

In eleven years of marriage there had never been one day that we didn’t see each other, but when I left he didn’t hear from me at all. After my business trip, I didn’t come home. After weeks of calls and questions to family about where I was, Darren was forced to admit to his sin. He was brought to the lowest point of his life. I’m glad I wasn’t there. In fact, I believe it is *because* I wasn’t there that God was able to deal with Darren in a very personal way without me getting in the middle of things.

It was in these weeks and months that Darren came into the light. He found community through a men’s support group and took the opportunity to share his grief and addiction with other men who were doing the same. He made big strides in making changes to save our marriage. He removed all televisions, video players, and computers. He even downgraded to a flip phone. He also found Roger Johnson, a therapist specializing in sexual addictions who has been critical in Darren’s recovery.

Once Darren got further into his recovery, he allowed himself some access to computers again. It was through his therapist, Roger, that Darren was introduced to Covenant Eyes Accountability software. This program monitors all the websites he visits and sends a report of his Internet use to the men he trusts. And thankfully, Darren now had men that loved him and kept him accountable without inflicting toxic shame on him.

The Grace I Desperately Needed

Unfortunately, by this time I was extremely disconnected from our relationship. I had the divorce papers in hand and demanded that Darren sign them. We sold the house, our furniture, and prepared for permanent separation. I didn’t want to feel the pain, so I became very cold and distant from friends and family. In many ways I was angry at Darren and at God because I felt that both of them had the power to change things for the better but decided against it. In deep despair I ran from love, honesty, joy, and self-control. I wanted to hurt those who had hurt me, but instead I only caused deep scars on my heart that I will carry until the day I die. Looking back, I would have done one

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thing differently. I would have let others into my disappointment before it turned into despair.

For some reason, only God knows, I kept the divorce papers in my purse and never filed them. In my angriest and most raging moments I couldn't bring myself to drop them in that big blue mailbox. During this time, Darren was given wise council from a man named Dave Semmelbeck. Dave told Darren to love me and be patient with me even though I was treating him with hate and disdain. The continual extension of grace toward me showed me that Darren was truly changing.

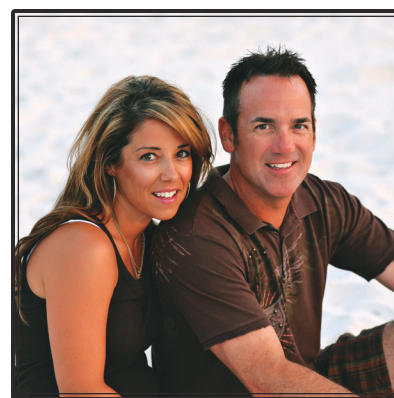
After months of watching Darren change as a man and become educated about his addiction, our relationship began to heal. Covenant Eyes played a huge role by giving me the comfort of knowing that men that I knew and trusted to hold Darren accountable were keeping him on track. That was no longer my job. I didn't have to worry about looking and finding something on his computer again. I could rely on other men to help Darren and to bring me into the conversation if they deemed necessary. To me, Covenant Eyes allowed me to heal as a wife and to begin to rebuild and renew my trust and respect toward my husband. Darren has the Covenant Eyes program on his laptop and the app on his iPhone.

Through my own counseling and therapy, I'm beginning to learn that Darren is responsible and accountable for his own actions. Darren took the steps to find real accountability in his life, and Covenant Eyes is one of the accountability tools that helps Darren to protect himself from himself.

God is now using the weakness that Darren tried so hard to disguise as a platform to share God's transforming power. Darren's ministry, called Sit in the Chair, is named after the time he was "strongly invited" to share his story at the men's group for the first time. It was at that time Darren had to face the imposter he had become. Following this confession, Darren started to develop true empathy for other men who are experiencing the same issues.

Our story is not our own: it's God's story, and we are not ashamed anymore. In our weakness, He shows how strong He is.

April Mabrey has been married to Darren for 18 years. They live in Dallas, Texas, with their twin girls, Luci and Sydni. April is a software engineer and loves karaoke, Zumba, and sushi. Darren is the Men's Director at their church and has a passion for sharing his story of freedom from toxic shame through his ministry called Sit in the Chair. April and Darren have a true desire to live authentic versions of themselves and are leading the way by sharing their story with anyone who will listen.



Forsaking All Others

Life After Porn



(Cindy's Story)

I'll never forget the first time I walked in on my husband looking at Internet pornography. Immediately my heart sank, and I remember this sick feeling wash over me. The thought that began to plague my mind instantly was, "How will I ever be able to compete with her?"

If I think about that day I can remember exactly what the woman looked like. How she was posing and what her facial expression was. I would tell you what she was wearing but that's just it...she wasn't wearing anything. She was very well endowed and made me look like I was just about to get my first training bra. Her long, gorgeous, blonde hair cascaded over her shoulders but not enough to cover up anything.

I knew my husband, Chris, struggled with lust because we'd been married for five years. His admissions seemed to be vulnerable and honest but I'd later find it was just a smokescreen. I didn't realize how hard it would hit me to walk in on him in the middle of him fulfilling his lustful moment. I guess I was okay with his sin being "out of sight, out of mind."

Faith and Filth

Chris' introduction to pornography came when he was merely eight years old. He didn't ask for his sin to begin at that age, but it did. And for a growing, curious boy the desire to see more only grew throughout the rest of his childhood and adolescence. The hunger could be satiated by an occasional look at a National Geographic if you weren't picky about the kind of naked women you'd see. His newfound addiction didn't totally bombard his life as a youngster simply because to obtain such racy material meant that you had to know someone who could buy a *Playboy* or a *Penthouse* from the local convenience store.

It wasn't until Chris became a follower of Christ at the age of 19 that he really realized he had a problem. I mean, it's fairly normal for any man, regardless of his age, to want to look at naked women. Most of the world doesn't feel bad about doing something that "all men do." So he didn't see anything wrong with it until one July day in 1991 when the gospel of Jesus Christ was presented to him in a small town diner in a way that he could truly understand. Chris accepted that Jesus Christ paid the price for his sins, and from that day forward it was apparent that God had changed his heart. Chris was different. One day he was a womanizer, dabbling in illegal drugs. The next day he was praying, worshipping God, and starting to tell others about this Jesus he just met. After a short time he even decided that one day he would like to enter into full-time ministry.

Now, I wish I could tell you that his newfound faith in Jesus zapped any desire from him to look at pornography. The truth is that he still struggled with it but seemed to have a handle on it until a little thing called the Internet showed up. And that, my friends, was like putting gas on a smoldering fire.

Only I had no idea how bad it was until one awful day: February 19, 2002.

The Devastating Confession

The date is indelibly written in my mind. I will never forget what I was doing when Chris walked in the door that Tuesday morning. We'd been in our new home in our new town for less than a week when he dropped the biggest bomb on me. After asking me to join him on the sofa, he proceeded to tell me that he'd been unfaithful to me many times with many different women over a period of about two-and-a-half years. In the midst of my immediate reeling, devastation, and line of questioning, he admitted that he was a full-blown porn addict.

In the early days, looking at pictures of naked women was enough to satisfy his craving. But, over time, looking at pictures turned into watching videos, which eventually turned into chatting with women who were just as messed up as he was. And before long, the unthinkable occurred: His online fantasy became a reality with a woman.

As he shared with me how this once small addiction spiraled out of control, I learned that these horrendous actions weren't because he didn't love me but because he was unable—or unwilling—to get free from his addiction. It sure didn't feel like he loved me but eventually I realized that the bondage that took over his life was more than he could handle. So he acted out.

Stipulations for Change

Within minutes of his confession we were in the company of people who really cared for us. Our pastor and several church staff members came to our aid and truly wanted to help us. We needed this badly because we hardly knew anyone in our church. But our church leaders told us if we really wanted help restoring our marriage, Chris would have some strict stipulations placed upon him. And some of these stipulations would inconvenience me. Was I ready for that?

Knowing the road ahead would be far from easy, Chris willingly said he would do *anything* and *everything* to get free. He said he was desperate for freedom. And even though a big part of me wanted to head for the hills and never look back, a bigger part of me wanted to see if this jacked-up marriage could be redeemed.

Chris resigned from his pastoral role at our church and immediately began to look for a new job. He has a college degree so how hard could it be to find something? The leadership team at our church told Chris that he could not get a job where he had access to a computer, was going to be alone with women, or had to travel. That left The Home Depot. Chris' new "salary" was more than cut in half by taking this new job. Strict stipulation number one.

The team also came and removed our computer from our home for more than two months. They wanted to make sure that Chris had no access to pornography. Talk about inconvenient. We had to go to the public library to check our e-mail. Strict stipulation number two.

Chris also was not allowed to do things on his own for several weeks except drive to work and back. He was either with us or his mentor from church. The team didn't want there to even be a hint of an opportunity to make a bad choice again. Strict stipulation number three.

Basically, the first few months after his "confession" were not easy even on the easiest days. It was inconvenient for both of us. Sometimes I would get frustrated that I had to deal with the consequences of his actions. But my pastor, Craig Groeschel, said that sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love more. Despite the crazy amount of hurt that my husband caused, I still loved him. The love I had for him didn't just "go away" because he wounded me. I was willing to set aside "me" in order to see "us" be healed. Even though it was painful and oftentimes dreadful, it was the choice I made, and I do not have one regret for making it.

As much as I loved my husband, I loved God more. I made a commitment to God early on in my college years that I would follow Him and live for Him no matter what. That I was "His girl" and that he could count on me even when things got rough. Well, things were rough, to say the least. However, even in the midst of my darkest hours, He was there comforting me because I leaned into Him instead of running from Him when the hurt, pain, and fear invaded my every thought.

As hard as the stipulations were, they were good. Necessary, even. I know that sounds contradictory to what I just wrote. The good didn't necessarily happen *during* all of this but as a *result* of everything. I don't believe that an addict can break free without a total abandonment of his or her drug. My husband certainly couldn't. We knew that eventually we would have a computer in our home again. I can't tell you the fear that struck in me. As much as I wanted the convenience of checking e-mail in my own home, I was frightened that my husband wouldn't be able to handle having his "drug" so available.

That's where Covenant Eyes came into play. Before the computer was brought back into our home, we made a plan to install the protection that Covenant Eyes Accountability software offers. Let me tell you, it was such a relief knowing that I would know every website that our computer went to. And when the day would come that Chris would have his own laptop for work, we would have that computer monitored as well.

Boundaries that Bring Freedom

Today—after years of counseling, accountability, and personal growth—Chris is back on staff at our church. He knows that every move he makes on his computer is monitored. Knowing that reports of his Internet activity are sent to his boss, his best friend, and to me help keep him free. Chris really doesn't want to go back to the life he lived for 20+ years, but when temptation arises, he knows that we will all know if he fails. And he will tell you that knowing that helps him so much.

Some people might feel like they are in prison with this kind of Internet protection. Not Chris. He saw the boundaries as keeping him free! He desperately desired freedom from the monster that invaded his life for so long. It didn't bother him that his every move was monitored. In fact, he thrived under this boundary!

Our world fell apart in 2002. It's been quite a journey to say the least. Every Thursday I still get a Covenant Eyes report that tells me all of the websites my husband visits. Week after week, year after year, I see the same common websites that he visits. I see that he likes to read reviews on products before he buys them. I see that he enjoys catching up on some sports every so often. I see that he watches a few silly videos on YouTube from time to time. But you know what I don't see?

Porn.

I am grateful for our path. Not because of the pain, but because of what the pain has brought about in our lives. My marriage is one of the healthiest I've ever seen. Trust has been restored in amazing ways because my husband and I have no secrets. We are truly best friends who want to keep our marriage strong. In order for that to happen, we do whatever it takes.

Hope After Porn

Cindy Beall is a writer, speaker and mentor to women. She and her husband, Chris, speak openly about their difficult journey through Chris' infidelity and pornography addiction that nearly destroyed their marriage and ministry. Through God's grace they have inspired thousands of people and have returned to full-time ministry where Chris serves as the Oklahoma City Campus Pastor at LifeChurch.tv. Cindy serves as the Sisters Women's Ministry leader for their campus. Her first book, *Healing Your Marriage When Trust Is Broken*, was published in 2011 through Harvest House Publishers.



Marriages Restored

While there are many differences in the details of these stories, there are several common threads.

First, all the men in these stories had to hit their own breaking points. The consequences of their actions caught up to them and they came to their senses. They reached a point where they realized what their sexual brokenness was costing them.

Second, all these couples, at one point or another, began leaning on others to help them—counselors, family members, close friends, church communities. Their husbands found great freedom admitting their helplessness and weakness. These women found great hope in knowing they didn't stand alone.

Third, all these couples looked to God to do a miracle in them. Vows had been broken. Trust was in shambles. Reckless habits had been formed. They had reached a point where they knew God needed to repair their hearts and marriages.

Last, all of these women found hope in knowing their husbands were being held accountable—both online and offline.

Internet Accountability: Taking Action

Covenant Eyes pioneered the concept of "Internet Accountability" in the year 2000. Unlike Internet filters, it does not block access to adult websites, but rather monitors everywhere you go online—every video, every picture, every web address—and assigns them an age-based rating, like T for Teen or M for Mature. A detailed and easy-to-read list is then automatically e-mailed every week to the person or people you trust.

Covenant Eyes provides a Filter for Windows computers that blocks inappropriate sites, as well as allowing you to choose when and for how long the Internet may be used.

How does Covenant Eyes help?

When a man voluntarily places Covenant Eyes on his computer and handheld devices he is, in effect, inviting others to walk with him in an effort to stop looking at pornography. If he gives into temptation, others can be there to challenge him and build him up.

When a man knows others are watching where he goes online, it makes him think twice about what he clicks on. It reminds him that seemingly private actions online have consequences: what he does online impacts his life offline.

When you receive his Internet reports (or when others you trust receive them), it helps to build a sense of openness and trust in your marriage.

Covenant Eyes provides a 30-day money-back guarantee. Learn more and try it out at CovenantEyes.com/wives-help.

