



hope after porn

**FOUR WIVES' TALES OF HEARTBREAK
AND HOW THEIR MARRIAGES WERE SAVED**

about this ebook



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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.

laura's story

our marriage would never be the same

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.

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.”

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.

I knew that somehow, he got the message that I would not fight this losing battle anymore.”

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 Screen 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.

I could step back and allow Ryan to develop his own internal passion to resist temptation."

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 over ten 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.

Pornography is insidious and destructive. No one is exempt from its effects and no one can handle it well.”

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.

About the Author

Laura Booz is the author of *Blogger Behave*. She and her husband Ryan live on a farm in Pennsylvania with their three children. Laura and her family enjoy homesteading, homeschooling, and ministering to their community. She blogs at www.10millionmiles.com.

april's story

gasping for air, hungry for grace

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.

Each time I caught him I died a little more on the inside. My respect for him was dying, too.”

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.

We were both hiding who he really was because neither one of us wanted to face the truth, albeit for different reasons.”

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

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.”

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.

Looking back, I would have done one thing differently. I would have let others into my disappointment before it turned into despair.”

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 Screen 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 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.

Through my own counseling and therapy, I'm beginning to learn that Darren is responsible and accountable for his own actions."

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.

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."

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,

About the Author

April Mabrey has been married to Darren for more than 20 years. They live in Dallas, Texas, with their twin girls, Luci and Sydni. April is a software engineer and loves karaoke, Zumba, and sushi. 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.

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.

cindy's story

forsaking all others

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.

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.”

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.

In the midst of my immediate reeling, devastation, and line of questioning, he admitted that he was a full-blown porn addict.”

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.

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."

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.

I don’t believe that an addict can break free without a total abandonment of his or her drug. My husband certainly couldn’t.”

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!

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."

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.

About the Author

April Mabrey has been married to Darren for more than 20 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 has a passion for sharing his story of freedom from toxic shame through his ministry called Sit in the Chair (www.sitinthechair.org). 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.

a word from a counselor

moving forward

Courage.

That's the first thing that comes to my mind as I reflect on the stories of these women.

I think many of us learn courage in the hard school of desperation, when faced with a situation we never imagined. The person who has promised to love, honor and cherish has instead lied, hidden, and cheated—that's desperation.

When the shock wears off, we have to choose how to respond. What is our way forward?

Years ago, a wise friend told me that when we find ourselves in a bad situation, we have three choices, and only three choices.

1. We can stay and conform.
2. We can stay and work for change.
3. We can leave.

Many of us find ourselves staying and conforming, at least initially. When I found out about my husband's pornography use, my first priority was preserving our marriage. Andy was very remorseful, and relieved that I had discovered his secret. He promised to quit immediately, and he felt that would be possible, now that I knew. He was very sincere—just very addicted, and neither of us realized that or knew how to deal with it. We both thought that if he wanted to quit, he would quit. As a result, I was nice and forgiving. I was trusting and non-confrontational. I was sad and hurt, but I tried not to bother him with my emotions, because he was so sincere in his desire to quit.

Later on, when I began to see how he couldn't quit on his own, and how our life together was falling apart as a result, I resolved to work for change. My initial push for change involved a lot of emotional display. I got angry and I stayed angry for a while. After that, I was deeply sad and grieving. I was clinically depressed for a couple of years, and I probably met the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), too. (I know this now, because I've since become a counselor.) I had all these expectations of what Andy's recovery would look like: there would be counseling, accountability, and processing to get to the root of the problem, and it would happen right now. This was met with marginal success and a fair amount of conflict between us as I tried to make him change the way I knew he needed to.

He needed to quit...but he needed my support in the process, not my control.”

I never left physically. Because Andy always wanted change, I never felt that was necessary. Eventually, however, I knew I had to leave the problem emotionally. I had to step back and let him do recovery his way. He wanted out of his habit, but my attempts to control that process pushed him away emotionally. He needed to quit—we both agreed on that—but he needed my support in the process, not my control. It actually took a lot of courage to stop controlling and just trust.

Andy did not do recovery the way I'd have planned it, but he did it. He started with practical steps: Covenant Eyes accountability and talking honestly with friends. He was resistant to individual counseling and he couldn't find group therapy, either. However, he was willing to read books and spend time processing things with me. It wasn't a programmed approach at all, but it was a sincere and successful effort over time. Ultimately, it has left him feeling competent to care for his own soul, which I think is enormously valuable.

Guaranteed Happy Ending?

All of the stories in this book have happy endings, and mine does too. In fact, our marriage is exponentially better today than it was before Andy ever looked at porn. Dealing with this issue sent us deeper with God and each other than we ever could have imagined.

But we are not living in a fairy tale. We are living in real life, and God never overrides our free will. Any of the men in these stories could have chosen to stay in their habits. Men do that. Women do that. Happy endings are not guaranteed.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have been told that they must conform to a decree to worship an idol of the king—or else be thrown into a fiery furnace. I love their reply:

“King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

God is able to deliver us and our marriages. But even if He does not, we are God’s children, and we can stand courageously in that, no matter what.

Boundaries

Another thing I see in all of these stories is the use of boundaries. Laura got some distance by going to her parents’ home for a while. April intentionally stayed away on business in order to give her husband space to work through his issues. Cindy allowed their church leaders to step in and set hard restrictions on her husband’s lifestyle so he could find freedom. All of them used Covenant Eyes on their home computers.

The basic idea behind boundaries is that we are all stewards of our own lives before God. Because of that, we have the freedom and the responsibility to choose what we will allow into our lives, and what we choose to exclude.

One of my clients told me that she sees boundaries like the door to a house. “I didn’t even know I was allowed to have a door,” she said. “I couldn’t understand why so many terrible things kept happening to me.”

Our boundaries enable us to close the door to all the invaders that want to steal, kill and destroy.

At the same time, we can choose to open the door to all the gifts of love that bring life, promoting health and healing.

For us, and for so many other couples, [Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability](#) is one of the best boundaries around. We don’t want the destructive force of pornography in our home, and Covenant Eyes helps us keep it out.

And, because it requires accountability partnership, Covenant Eyes also opens the door to connection, honesty, freedom, and self-control. It’s been very helpful for Andy to know that he’s got the support of his accountability partners. And it’s been a huge relief to me that I don’t have to be the Internet police. Covenant Eyes lets him be responsible for himself, while building supportive relationships with his partners.

Our boundaries enable us to close the door to all the invaders that want to steal, kill and destroy.”

However, Covenant Eyes is not the only boundary that we need. One of the things I see very commonly with pornography use is an increase in “destructive entitlement” in the user. The user feels

like they can and should have what they want, when they want it. When they don't get what they want, they often feel entitled to be unkind or even abusive to the people standing in the way of their enjoyment.

When Andy was in recovery, I could tell when he'd been using pornography again, because he'd say things to me like this: "You've gained weight. If you cared about me, you'd exercise more." At first, I thought this was just part of Andy's particular set of problems. However, other women began to relate similar stories to me, and then I ran across an article at the Psychology Today¹ blog, based on a study from Florida State University. Researchers wanted to know how pornography use impacted partner commitment, and this is what they found:

"While porn actors are not really an option for most of us, spending time in their company can give us the impression that we live in a world with many available alternatives. And when we believe we have other attractive choices, we're instinctively less committed to the partner we already have."

I think the movement away from commitment and toward entitlement by pornography users is what generates much of the painful behavior that gets directed toward spouses and partners. We're faced with words or actions that are not at all what we want in our lives. When that happens, it's good to have some extra boundary skills in the toolbox.

Here are some example boundaries from *Boundaries in Marriage* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend.

Physical boundaries might comprise:

- + Removing yourself from any situation that makes you uncomfortable.
- + Taking time away to think through situations for yourself.
- + Moving out of the house for a period of time.
- + Separating from an abusive situation.

Emotional boundaries could include:

- + Bringing in a third party to help resolve conflict.
- + Finding a support group for yourself.
- + Attending counseling sessions for yourself.

Boundaries might be expressed like this:

- + "If you continue to speak to me that way, I will need to leave the room."
- + "I love you, but I don't trust you right now. I can't be that close until we work this out."
- + "When you show me that you are serious about getting some help, I will feel safe enough to open up to you again."

What Does Growth Look Like?

Everybody wants to know this: how can I ever trust him again?

First of all, evaluate the health of the relationship in these ways:

- + The person with the habit is consistently and voluntarily doing whatever he can, in terms of practical prevention: Internet blocking, filtering, and regular accountability. These things should be an ordinary part of everyday life, not something that's your job in a crisis.
- + You are each able to identify and take responsibility for your own issues. He has a habit, and you have emotions about that. While he does his work, you do yours as well.
- + You are comfortable with the boundaries you have in place. You are able to say "yes" to the healthy things and "no" to the unhealthy things.
- + You understand how pornography affects the other person in the relationship and have emotional empathy for your partner's struggle. He should understand your pain, and that it takes time to work through those emotions. At the same time, it's important for you to see him as a person with deep desires. Whatever boundaries you choose—and sometimes leaving is the best boundary to have—God loves him and longs for his healing.
- + There are people in your lives who are aware of what you're working on, and who are able to talk with you, give feedback, and offer support. This goes for both parties.
- + You are growing in the ability to have normal, non-crisis conversations about how you are doing with your issues, and how the relationship is impacted.
- + You are able to bring your mess to God and to your community of faith, rather than having to hide it or pretend it away.
- + You have a voice. You feel valued. You're growing and being the person God created you to be. The same should be true for him, too.

Conclusion

On our wedding day, I said “for better or for worse,” and I meant it. But I never foresaw a pornography addiction and a marriage in such crisis that I thought it would fail. I never wanted to be in that place of despair and desperation.

And yet, desperation drove us past the pain, past the fear, past the anger to courage, to resolution, and most of all, to the experience that we are safe in love. Andy and I both learned that. We are safe in God’s passionate love for us, and we are safe in our love for each other.

When I first found out about Andy’s addiction, I was reading Henri Nouwen’s book, *Turn My Mourning Into Dancing*. Nouwen says that when we really believe that God redeems, “we can be grateful for every moment we have lived.” In fact, says Nouwen, true hope requires that we learn to be grateful for every part of life. He says this: “When our gratitude for the past is only partial, our hope for the future can likewise never be full.”

**We are safe in God’s passionate love for us,
and we are safe in our love for each other.”**

When I first read that, I thought, “This man is crazy.

I can never be grateful for this!” But two years later, I realized it was true. I was grateful. Not grateful for sin, but grateful for redemption. Grateful for the miracle God had done, in turning our marriage into something so much more than I could have dreamed.

Grateful to be a stronger, richer, more vulnerable, more joyful person. Grateful that Andy was having those experiences, too.

Grateful, most of all, that nothing is ever, ever, ever out of the hands of Love. No matter what the future holds, we know Who holds the future.

So, in the words of C. S. Lewis: “Courage, dear heart.”

You are never out of His hands.

The Value of Software in Recovery

Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability rates every website for its content and then compiles all of that information into an easy-to-read report that is emailed to the people you choose as accountability partners.

Common Question: Should I Receive My Husband's Reports?

Kay says: I don't recommend that a wife be the sole "accountability partner" for her husband, especially when he has had a past struggle with pornography. Rather, choose whether you want to be one of the people who gets his reports, but allow him to find good accountability partners you can both trust—men who will challenge him to live up to being the man and husband is he called to be.

Perhaps you will want to get his reports every week to help rebuild your trust in him. Perhaps seeing the weekly struggles and temptations he faces will be too difficult for you to see. Either way, Covenant Eyes Reports are an incredible tool for helping a man realize that what he does online impacts his life offline. They equip true accountability partners with the information to help the struggling porn addict. And they can also give you the peace of mind you need for your heart to heal.

[Get Screen Accountability](#)

About the Author

Kay Bruner has been married to her husband Andy for over 25 years. They were members of Wycliffe Bible Translators for 20 years. During that time, they worked in the Solomon Islands, assisting a local team to complete a New Testament translation into the Arosi language. They have four children and two poodle rescue dogs. They live in the Dallas area where Andy works for SIL International, Wycliffe's sister organization. Kay is a Licensed Professional Counselor Intern with Rapha Christian Counseling. You can read more from Kay at www.kaybruner.com and in her book, *As Soon as I Fell*.

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