

The Seven Keys



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who have struggled under the burden of pornography use as well as their loved ones and support people. Hope for eventual recovery helps people rally together in the quest for peace and fulfillment in obeying God's commandments. The love people have for God and each other in this cause is truly inspiring. I appreciate being part of this great transformation process. I also want to thank my wife Nancy for her love and unwavering support.

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Preface

The Seven Keys manual is based on seven core principles for recovery from compulsive pornography use and other problematic sexual behaviors. It is short by design so that interested individuals can get right to the important concepts and skills that they need to learn. I have been running groups to help people with pornography problems for about 15 years now. There are many different programs and books created to help people with these issues. I believe that all of them use some combination of these seven basic concepts.

The main intent is to get people started down the road to recovery. I know by the time people seek help they have usually struggled for years. It is easy to become discouraged because of regrets or the burden of dealing with such a complex habit. My hope is that this book is short enough and clear enough that people can make some quick progress and become enthused about their personal journey. I have seen many people change over the years and know these principles are powerful and can work for anyone. I also have total confidence that the Savior of the world will help you learn and grow if you are sincere and do your part.

In this manual you will be learning about the dual system model of the brain. Although it is not new, most people are unfamiliar with how to utilize this knowledge. I will say unequivocally that it is a true game changer! As you experiment with the various techniques that are provided, you will find out for yourself how very helpful they are. At the end of each chapter there is an action plan that prescribes certain practice exercises. If you only read the manual, you will have a nice intellectual workout, but there will be no real change. As you perform the exercises faithfully you will take important steps toward self-mastery. As the great 19th century philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The education of the will is the object of our existence.”

The program I have been running is called the Next 12 Steps. This program places an emphasis on emotional skill building, positive psychology, leading a value-based life, and seeking recovery through faith in Jesus Christ. There are more materials available on the website, <https://www.RecoveryLDS.com/> which you are encouraged to look at.

Additionally, there is information available about online groups. Individuals who have this manual could attend an online group regularly or just pop in to have any questions answered. There is no charge for participation. Being part of this recovery work is a personal mission for me and one I feel very strongly about. All souls are precious in the sight of God, and everyone can change!

The Seven Keys of Recovery

1. Make a 100 percent decision to relinquish pornography and carnal behavior- *I no longer want this to be part of my life. I am fully ready to follow the Savior and move on to a more spiritual path. I understand that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10). I will humbly ask the Savior for power, revelation, and understanding to help me master the skills involved in the recovery process.*

2. Boundaries- Human beings have less self-control when temptation is close by. Therefore, one of the first signs of a change in attitude regarding personal purity is to set up rules and limits to make access more difficult. Some examples would be limiting social media, not browsing the Internet without another person present, filters on personal devices, and resisting lustful thoughts and images.

3. Truth- Use truth to motivate the inner emotional self to avoid self-deception, make correct decisions, and to maintain righteous attitudes regarding purity. “Light and truth forsake that evil one.” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:7).

We can especially use truth to attack counterfeit connection fantasies. All human beings have a deep need to connect with a partner. This is an eternal desire which is very positive in its nature. However, the fantasy of meeting attachment needs through non-committal sexual behavior or pornographic images must be challenged with truth. Carnal behavior destroys relationships and separates people from the Spirit. Reality-testing lustful desires cuts to the very root of the problem and can bring about rapid change.

4. Develop a support network- One of the first steps in recovery is recognizing that you cannot do it alone. Secrecy and isolation are obstacles to change. It is important to let others in to gain additional knowledge and perspective, be held accountable, and to receive emotional support. Supports could include your bishop, family members, friends, your spouse, a recovery partner, group meetings, or an individual therapist.

5. Emotional coping skills- Learn to manage negative emotions through greater awareness, effective problem-solving, and changing thoughts and beliefs. Maladaptive subconscious beliefs about self are often present with compulsive habits and need to be challenged. Developing one’s cognitive skills is a key component of personal growth.

6. Self-care- Compulsive pornography viewing is more about emotional dependency than sex. Individuals generally use pornography when they feel bored, anxious, lonely, or unfulfilled. Pornography is a poor substitute for healthy relationships and genuine inner peace and satisfaction. Change your desires by meeting your real needs appropriately, resolving negative moods, and learning to be kind and supportive to yourself.

7. Make spirituality your greatest priority- Recognize that spirituality is dualistic in its essence. The first aspect of spirituality is to engage in religious practices such as prayer, scripture study, and temple attendance and to seek the Holy Ghost. The second aspect of spirituality could be summarized as engaging in a positive lifestyle. Some elements of this lifestyle would be participating in constructive activities, serving others, strengthening relationships, and maintaining positive thoughts, emotions, and desires. These two aspects are synergistic and complement and reinforce each other. Recovery is not just about letting something go, it is about embarking on a new way of life.

Chapter 1

Commitment



Pornography and misguided sexual behavior never lead to happiness. This type of behavior is a trade-off, the selling of one's character, spiritual well-being, and future marital success for the sake of temporary pleasure and distraction.

O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe. (2 Nephi 1:13)

The word addiction is overused and widely misunderstood. It implies that people are helpless regarding their ability to resist performing some behavior. There are also theories about compromised brain functioning from habitual use, generally alcohol or drugs. While some of this may be valid, it still does not fully explain addictions, nor are present treatments for addictions very successful.

I believe that the term “compulsive use” is more appropriate and fits a wider range of individuals. Compulsive use implies that the person engages in the behavior more often than he would like and has difficulty stopping. I will be using this term throughout this manual.

The Compulsive Cycle

1. *Temptation* - A combination of curiosity, desire for adventure, and innocence lead to first encounters with pornography. Naturally, the young person finds this behavior exciting and pleasurable and wants to repeat it.
2. *The hook of sin* - Further experimentation with pornography and masturbation lead to internal subconscious associations equating this sin with relief from stress or boredom.
3. *Habit* - Unresolved negative emotions or unmet needs begin to trigger desires to act out. The individual becomes highly conditioned and subconscious cravings to act out are generated in response to unpleasant emotional states.
4. *Shame* - Additional pressure from unresolved emotional issues plus added feelings of guilt and shame lead to increased desires to act out.
5. *Isolation* - Secrecy and deception lead to distant relationships. Feelings of isolation and spiritual darkness due to sin create greater emotional deprivation and an increase in the frequency of self-indulgence.
6. *Feeling trapped* - Powerful conditioned cravings, inability to control the habit, self-hatred, and hopelessness can culminate in a compulsive cycle of acting out.

So how does one change? The first step is having the right attitude. There are several aspects to this—recognizing there is a problem, letting others in for help and support, having a willingness to put the work in to learn new skills, and asking the Lord to be part of your recovery team. It is also essential to be “fully in.” In my experience, those who are not totally committed to change will take several years to achieve recovery.

The work involves not just reading this short manual, but, more importantly, performing the exercises provided in the “action plan” at the end of each chapter. We learn best by doing! Experience changes attitudes more quickly than any other modality, and new habits are built through practice. We must demonstrate the required faith and willingness to take each next step toward progress.

Accomplishing the Impossible

As we strive to be faithful in obeying the commandments, the Lord will bless us with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. The Holy Ghost can provide immeasurable help as we try to cope with life's many challenges. The Spirit enhances our natural abilities and gives us peace, emotional strength, and clarity of mind even when storms rage around us.

Now if He chose to, the Lord could take away most of our problems. However, we will ever be frustrated if we demand miracles that are not in accordance with God's will. In seeking the assistance of the Lord, there is one very important concept to remember. Except in special circumstances, the Lord will not do for us things that we could do for ourselves. If we ask for help, rather than doing physical miracles such as parting the Red Sea, He seems to prefer to bless us with inspiration (powerful ideas that offer new solutions). Think of Moroni developing armor and walled forts for the Nephites. However, before God provides this invaluable insight, he usually desires that we take some real strides to solve the problem ourselves. Think of this as the Oliver Cowdery principle.

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. (D&C 9:7)

Action Plan

1. Put on your spiritual armor each day by engaging in prayer and scripture study.
2. It takes a 100 percent commitment to get over pornography use. Write out the pros and cons of changing. If you are not ready to commit, when will you be ready? What would it take to get ready? Make a firm decision regarding your willingness to overcome this habit.

All victory and glory is brought to you through your diligence, faithfulness, and prayers of faith. (D&C 103:36)

Notes

Picture 1 – “Trapped man” 8/4/2018, photo by @Nomadsoul1, Royalty free license purchased from Dreamstime.com, photo file ID 31934275.

Chapter 2

Boundaries

The saltwater crocodile has a bite force of up to 3700 psi, over 20 times more powerful than a human. Sticking your hand inside its mouth is probably not a good idea! Likewise, exposing ourselves to temptation is not wise. Many people choose to experiment with sin, hoping they can enjoy quick and easy pleasures without experiencing any real consequences. Unfortunately, finding true joy in life is not so simple, and they may find themselves painfully trapped by their negative habits.



Human beings have diminished self-control when temptation is close by. Therefore, one of the first signs of a change in attitude regarding personal purity is to set up rules and limits to make access more difficult. Some examples would be limiting social media, not browsing the Internet without another person present, filters on personal devices, and resisting lustful thoughts and images.

The 60-Second Freeze

When tempted, people can easily lose their perspective and fall into self-deception and impulsive behavior. The 60-second freeze is a technique designed to slow down these undesirable patterns. The instructions are simple! When tempted, stop everything, turn off all media, and count to 60 slowly, or else focus on the digital display of a watch or timer for 60 seconds. This brief respite provides plenty of time for the logical mind to kick back in gear. It is also a good opportunity to get out any prepared cue sheets regarding your recovery goals and practices.

Mission Rules

For those who are serious about making rapid progress, there is a hard-core way. This involves using mission rules regarding technology. The central feature of mission rules is that there is no use of technology when alone. There is one practical adjustment to the present guidelines, however. It is permissible to get on the Internet for work or school, or when there is a specified task to be done. There should be no surfing or recreational use of the Internet when alone. That must wait until there are others present. Don't worry, these rules need only apply till individuals feel more in control of their behavior. Mission rules can give you a nice jump start on recovery.

Distraction

The emotional self is quite suggestible. What we bring to mind whets our appetites. Therefore, one part of setting boundaries is keeping our attention off our vices. If we feel like gazing at pornography or checking out people sexually, it is important to change our focus.

And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear. (D&C: 63:16)

The mind tends to get fixated on whatever we focus on for several minutes in a row. We experience this "broken record" phenomenon when we cannot get songs out of our minds that we have been humming. We can use this mental feature to our advantage. When inappropriate thoughts

or imagery linger in your mind, fight to switch your attention. Use the 3-second rule. Here are several techniques that can help.

Techniques to help channel the mind

a. Spiritual focus

Every time you begin to dwell on undesirable thoughts or images, say “stop” and then sing a hymn in your mind. Do this just for a minute or two and move on to some positive activity. Repeating a meaningful word such as “purity” or a phrase from the scriptures such as “wickedness never was happiness” can also be useful.

b. Cover-up technique

To blot out an unwanted image: cover the person up with a tarp; picture a stage curtain being closed; or have a dense, dark fog move in that obscures visibility.

c. Visual imagery

Picture a captivating nature scene: waves crashing onto a beach, a giant redwood tree, a stream cascading through a canyon, or an eagle gliding through the air.

Once the mind has been redirected, keep busy with wholesome activities such as work, art, socializing, uplifting music, or reading.

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? (Proverbs 6:27)

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7-8)

Action Plan

1. Recognize your patterns — the gradual steps, triggers, times of day, or places that often lead to acting out. Write down some personal rules and boundaries you will choose to keep in order to remain sober; e.g. no Internet after 10 PM or avoiding certain web sites.

2. Mental rehearsal- Visualize yourself being tempted to cross one of your boundaries. Practice defeating any self-deceptions you can imagine coming up that might tempt you to cross your boundaries. Here are some examples of deceptive thought to consider.

Rationalization: Excuses a person makes to lessen his own sense of responsibility and accountability for a behavior. *There’s a lot going on right now in my life, I’ll quit when the things calm down.*

Minimization: Pretending a negative behavior is not as serious as it really is. *If no one knows, there is no real harm done.*

Justification: Providing reasons supporting the necessity of the behavior given the circumstances. *I have to do something to relieve stress.*

Notes

Picture 1 “A zookeeper teases a crocodile.” 02 November 2009, Pattaya, Thailand — photo by Friday, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 104305102.

Chapter 3

Changing Desires with Truth



The Roman Colosseum was completed in the year 80 AD by the Emperor Titus. It was made of concrete, marble, stone, and timber, stood 157 feet high, and had the capacity for an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 people. One of the most amazing things about the 2,000 year-old Colosseum is that, like many other ancient Roman concrete structures such as seawalls and aqueducts, it is still standing. Modern concrete starts to crumble after 50 years, so what was so different about Roman concrete?

Scientists have shown recently that the crucial factor may have been the addition of burnt limestone to the concrete mix. Burning the limestone prevented the lime from fully dissolving when mixed with water. Researchers were able to show that when cracks appeared in the Roman-type cement, the lime lumps would react with rainwater and dissolve and recrystallize, effectively filling the cracks. This appears to be why the ancient concrete has stayed strong for centuries. Modern Portland concrete typically does not heal cracks larger than 0.2 or 0.3 millimeters across. Roman concrete, by contrast, can heal cracks up to 0.6 millimeters across!¹

Just as limestone appears to be the magic ingredient in Roman cement, there is a very special gospel principle that can help people recover from a pornography habit. Though clearly expressed in the scriptures, the power of this element of the gospel may be greatly underappreciated. Those who are willing to practice their skills with this formidable tool will find victory much more attainable. So, what is this amazing principle? It is truth!

Light and truth forsake that evil one. (D&C 93:7)

Before we can discuss how truth works, we must first consider the makeup of the human personality. Modern neuroscience tells us that we have a dual process mind. Desires and emotions are mostly associated with the limbic system, a deeper part of the brain. Logical thought processes and self-control are mainly associated with the prefrontal cortex, which lies behind the forehead and is part of the frontal lobe.

The limbic system (the emotional system) produces emotions and desires in response to memories and cues from the environment. It also memorizes subroutines of behavior so we can act automatically. Playing a violin or driving a car are examples of rehearsed behavior skilled individuals can do automatically. The prefrontal cortex (the logical system) is responsible for abstract thought and reasoning. These two systems must work together as issues come into play. First, the limbic system creates a personalized response to each event. The prefrontal cortex interprets these emotions and impulses, and then logically attempts to regulate our thoughts, behavior, and feelings via extensive connections with other brain regions. If you took away the prefrontal cortex, we would be ruled by our desires and impulses, lacking an ability to fully appreciate consequences or plan future actions. This is the state of pre-school children whose frontal lobe is still developing.

The emotional system works quickly and automatically on a subconscious level. This helps us to do things like react to danger, play sports, socialize, or perform routine tasks without having

to think through every action. These behaviors and reactions are already programmed in. When the logical mind wants to program in a new behavior, it must induce the emotional system to join in on the goal. This is where the problems begin. The emotional system generally does not like to change. Change is threatening and can take a good deal of effort. Secondly, the emotional system is far stronger than the logical system. It does not have to cooperate unless it feels like doing so. Our two minds are more often battling than working together. This is why human beings struggle with self-discipline. The neuroscientist David Eagleman who wrote the book *Incognito* called the two systems “a team of rivals.”²

Jonathan Haidt likened this relationship of the two mind systems to that of a rider on an elephant. The rider knows what he wants the elephant to do, but if the elephant feels in danger or if it really wants to meet a need like going into a river to cool off, there is very little the puny rider can do to stop it.³

Not surprisingly, the Lord knows all about the human brain, and this dual mind system concept is spoken about repeatedly in the scriptures. Note that the scriptures point to the “mind” and “heart” as the two parts of the brain most active in creating thoughts and actions.

Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. (D&C 8:2)

Therefore, O ye that embark in the ^aservice of God, see that ye ^bserve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand ^cblameless before God at the last day. (D&C 4:2)

Other scriptures point to the importance of changing the heart and having the heart (emotional system) and mind (logical system) both pointed toward righteousness.

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)

A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. (Matthew 12:35)

Purify your hearts, ye double-minded. (James 4:8)

It is recognized that most people do not take these scriptures literally and think the Lord is only speaking metaphorically. They believe the word *heart* merely refers to things we are passionate about. I would submit a question to all who hold this view, “How do you think people change behavior? What is your model?” I would propose that those who experiment for a time with the concepts being explained will gain the greatest victory of all, which is power over self.

Changing Desires

So finally, where does truth fit in? As we go through the repentance process, we set goals for change. Generally, the logical mind decides what behavior needs to be adjusted and the heart (the emotional system) resists. If the heart wanted to perform the target behavior, we would already be enthusiastically pursuing it! The great secret of the whole matter is that the logical mind can use truth to persuade the heart to take steps toward the desired goal. Since obeying God’s principles always brings us more joy and satisfaction, the heart learns through experience to appreciate the new behavior, and through repetition forms new habits.

Human beings want to be happy. Accordingly, we continually entertain desires and fantasies about what we want. These impulses range from small things such as eating a candy bar

to thinking about what kind of car we would like to buy. However, satisfying all our whims would not work out well because some desires are unrighteous or unwise. Giving into aggressive or dishonest impulses or seeking brief pleasure from drugs, alcohol, or illicit sexual pursuits generally produces momentary rewards followed by very bad results.

We can use truth to motivate the inner emotional self to avoid self-deception, make correct decisions, and to maintain righteous attitudes regarding purity. The logical mind associated with the prefrontal cortex is able to reason with the emotional mind to persuade it to make good choices. We can change our desires by pointing out the rewards contingent upon good behavior and the consequences of poor behavior choices. By putting forth correct arguments in a skillful manner, we can gain control of our behavior. Willpower alone is insufficient as the emotional system is too strong for the logical system of the brain. The goal is to use effective self-talk to persuade the emotional self to do the right thing. The truth really can “set us free” as promised by the Savior in John 8:32. The Holy Ghost amplifies our efforts to purify ourselves and to seek the good.

We can especially use truth to attack counterfeit connection fantasies. All human beings have a deep need to connect with a partner. This is an eternal desire which is very positive in its nature. However, the fantasy of meeting attachment needs through non-committal sexual behavior or pornographic images must be challenged with truth. Reality-testing lustful desires cuts to the very root of the problem and can bring about rapid change.

Here are some examples of truth statements. *People who display their bodies on-line are troubled souls you would probably never want to be in a relationship with. Brief sexual encounters based on lust bring little satisfaction, but great consequences. Lustful thoughts are disrespectful because the aim is to use other people for selfish sexual gratification. Cheating on your spouse always leads to disaster! Outer attractiveness does not translate to relationship compatibility.*

Action Plan

1. Covert conditioning: Make a movie in your mind using visual imagery. Picture yourself for just a few seconds about to commit a sin you are troubled with. Then, as dramatically as possible, portray yourself suffering the resulting consequences of that sin. Take a minute or two for this part.

2. Self-talk: Whenever you are tempted to break your boundaries or are confronted with sinful desires, remind yourself that this action won't make you happy, but will instead lead to problems. Defeat self-deception with truth. Reason with yourself kindly. PERSUADE, ENCOURAGE, SUPPORT.

3. Attack the fantasy: Practice using truth statements to alter lustful feelings and desires.

4. Emergency kit: The purpose of this “kit” is to increase awareness and provide powerful direction and reminders about staying out of danger sexually. Read your emergency kit at least once per day, and especially when seriously tempted.

Part A Write out the positive reasons why you wish to stay morally clean.

Part B List all the possible consequences for continuing in this perilous behavior.

Part C Add inspiring scriptures, quotes, or statements that touch your heart.

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: (Proverbs 23:7)

Notes

1. Jacklin Kwan, Scientists may have found the magic ingredient behind Rome's self-healing concrete. *Science*, 6 Jan. 2023.
2. David Eagleman, *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).
3. Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006)

Picture 1: Rome, Italy—10 March 2018: ancient Colosseum ruins with crowded square – photo by Anna Nepa BO, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 192723128.

Chapter 4

Develop a Support Network

One night in the group I was running at the time, a new member was speaking about how he came to arrive in the group. He spoke about his years of struggle and the many problems his habit had caused. Then he noted with some strong feelings that he had finally come to the realization that he could not get over this habit on his own. The rest of the group nodded sympathetically, and he stated with humility and wisdom, “I guess realizing you can’t do it by yourself is the first step, isn’t it?”

Well, he was exactly right! Few people can recover all on their own. Most have a critical need for knowledge, guidance, and support. Secrecy and isolation are tremendous obstacles to change because this generally means you must figure out the entire complicated process on your own. Very few can do it, though many have tried and failed.



It is vitally important to have the humility to let others in. It also takes courage because there is one big concern. Secrecy had some advantages. If no one knew about the problem, you felt safe. Now, each person you potentially let in can judge you or reject you. This seems threatening to someone whose sense of self-worth may already feel shaky.

From the experience of conducting recovery groups for 15 years, this writer can share a helpful observation. In the great majority of cases, the person reaching out for support receives love and acceptance. We all root for people who are sincerely trying to change. Additionally, most are quite aware of the scripture in John 8:8 that says, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35)

Though it may feel like coming clean is one of the hardest things you have ever done, finally being honest with your loved ones (and your bishop) will feel like a bright, new chapter in your life has opened. It feels really good to stop hiding! Telling a marital partner you have betrayed her (or him) with pornography, and possibly other issues, will be more difficult. I have seen that if the offender is fully sincere and shows dedication to the Lord and their recovery, forgiveness can be found. There are some rules for disclosure. Not everyone needs to know. Be careful who you decide to trust. Generally, being open and honest ends well, though clearly it is a challenging enterprise.

What can you hope to expect from the people in your support network? Recovery is not a quick or easy process. As you confide in your support people and share your feelings, they will offer understanding and encouragement that will prove a balm to your soul. They can also help hold you accountable if you have asked them to play that role. They can ask you if you are reading and studying, watching your boundaries, attending meetings, and practicing new skills. Support people could include your bishop, family members, friends, your spouse, an accountability partner, a recovery group, or an individual therapist. Part of the job of building a support network is figuring out what you need. Your bishop can provide spiritual guidance and a therapist can help you learn

about valuable tools to manage impulses and emotions. Groups can offer the perspective and wisdom of others going through the same thing, as well as teach the steps of recovery and various skills.

Teamwork

A recovery partner can play a very valuable role beyond support. The nature of this problem is such that the person struggling loses some awareness and logical ability when tempted. The recovery partner can be a cool head and provide some timely balanced advice. The first issue is often to determine the degree of temptation. The “traffic light” approach works quite well for this task. *Green* means the person is stable, (a good mood with no temptation), *yellow* signifies that there is moderate temptation or significant mood problems, and *red* means danger zone (the person feels agitated and temptation is high).

If the recovering spouse is yellow or red, his partner can ask him to share what is bothering him. She can then ask him how he will meet the real need appropriately. If he is being triggered by negative emotions, she can ask him which tools he plans on using (see chapters 5 and 6 in this book on coping skills, or use the Coping Skills App, available on the website <https://www.recoveryLDS.com>).

Collateral Damage

For those who are married or in a close romantic relationship, there is a great responsibility to care for the person you are injuring the most. One of the most difficult aspects of being the spouse of a compulsive user of pornography is the sense of helplessness and loss of control over one’s life. This lack of security and feelings of betrayal often lead to anger, fear, and depression. It is natural for the spouse to have strong emotions as she adjusts to such a serious situation.

Spouses are going through an emotional ordeal, and they need the help of both the Lord and their husband to get through their trial more gracefully. No word fits the enormity of the situation except for the use of the word “trauma.” And it is certainly an ongoing trauma, as recovery for the offending spouse is not usually quick or straightforward. Here are some of the emotions and accompanying thoughts she might be experiencing.

Shock- I can’t believe this is happening to me!

Hurt- How could he do this to me? He is my husband. He is supposed to love me and care about my feelings.

Disgust- Who are you? How could you do those terrible things?

Betrayal- I thought I could trust you. You have lied to me. I don’t feel safe with you anymore.

Insecurity- Did I cause this? Maybe this happened because I am not as good a wife as he needed?

Anger- He is such a jerk to have done this to me. I’ll make him go through hell and he won’t dare do this anymore. He deserves to suffer for what he has put me through.

Fear- How can I cope with these emotions? I am completely overwhelmed!

Hopelessness- My life is a train wreck. Things will never be good again.

Emotional distance- I have no feelings for him. I just don’t care what he does anymore.

There is one important similarity between the user and the spouse. The situation for both can be overwhelming! The user needs to develop a better lifestyle, but both need to learn new emotional coping tools and to sharpen their relationship skills. As individuals are tossed about in

this “ocean of emotion,” does it not make sense to work together to find peace and security? Therefore, the support will need to work both ways. The spouse can utilize many of the same tools the husband is learning to deal with emotions. Both will have a need to be listened to and to receive encouragement. One important principle does need to be employed to find real success. Learn to express oneself kindly and with respect despite the inner turmoil. That is the language of God. (There is a check-in sheet for spouses in the addendum at the back of this manual.)

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

Dealing with Loneliness

Let us address the issue of loneliness. There is a Harvard study that began in 1938 and continues to this day. This project follows Harvard graduates and other men from the Boston area for their entire lives, looking at factors that may contribute to health and happiness. There have been over 2,000 subjects involved in this research. Their main finding was that positive, close relationships have the greatest effect on both health and happiness over the course of a lifetime.¹

Compulsive users of pornography tend to become closed off because of their shame and interest in keeping their behavior hidden. This emotional separation from others is such a problem for human beings that some therapists claim it is the root cause of compulsive sexual habits. While this seems to be an oversimplification of a complex issue, deep connections to others are essential for joyful living. Those who feel disconnected from others certainly may resort to a destructive habit to numb their pain.

Negative beliefs regarding making close friends, finding a romantic partner, or achieving emotional intimacy in a marriage can contribute to depressive feelings and trigger acting out episodes. Human beings do not thrive without close connections to others. Finding remedies for relationship concerns is a weighty matter that is beyond the scope of this short manual. However, there is a chapter on improving relationships in another book I have written called *The Next 12 Steps*. This book is available on the same website noted previously in this chapter, <https://www.recovery LDS.com>.

As you progress in your recovery, there will be opportunities for you to serve. These may be associated with helping others get over a pornography problem, it may be helping people in your social circle, or it may be church-related. Whichever the case, these are golden opportunities to get over preoccupation with self and more into serving the Lord. The Lord is very pleased when he sees his children helping each other. Service is an integral part of becoming a more spiritual person, the ultimate aim of recovery. Additionally, serving others leads to closer relationships.

Action Plan

1. Decide what type of support you may need to add to make your recovery efforts stronger. If there are obstacles or fears, decide how you can overcome them. Nothing is more important than your spiritual progress!

Notes

1. Liz Mineo, Good genes are nice, but joy is better. *Harvard Gazette*, April 11, 2017.

Picture 1 “Casual man welcoming to his team,” 24 September 2012, photo by Feedough, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 13212433.

Chapter 5

Coping Skills (Part A)

In 1995 Daniel Goleman wrote a book entitled *Emotional Intelligence* that was on The New York Times best-seller list for a year and half and has been translated into 40 languages. Five million copies of the book have been sold. He had this to say about the importance of mastering our emotional life, “Emotional intelligence is the key to both personal and professional success.”

Goleman's EQ theory comprises five core components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.¹

Obtaining some proficiency in managing negative emotions happens to be one of the keys to overcoming a pornography problem. Negative emotions are a frequent trigger to acting out because the individual has not yet developed the awareness and skills to consistently modulate his emotions in more suitable ways. Several principles and tools will be provided in this chapter and the next to help the reader become more proficient in coping.

Overview of Emotions

Managing emotions is the major life skill for which we receive the least training. There seems to be the idea that everyone should just know how to do it. That is like expecting people to know how to play the piano because they had one in the living room while growing up. If you did want to learn to play the piano at a beginner level, there seems to be some consensus that you need instruction and you must practice at least one-half hour per day for three months to a year. The simple point is that those who wish to improve their emotional skills likewise need instruction and practice.

Negative emotions are like pesky insects that land on us. We just want to brush them off and move on. So, the first reaction for most people is to ignore their emotions and try to distract themselves. They might get back to work, have a snack, or get on the Internet. If the problem is small, the negative energy dissipates over time, and things soon go back to normal.

Dealing with emotions could be compared to river rafting. When the current is slow and the channel wide, rafting is a simple endeavor. However, when the current becomes swift and there are large rapids, a great deal of expertise is required to keep the raft from overturning. Similarly, when life is calm, emotions are relatively easy to manage. We can suppress any negative emotions and just move on. However, when larger problems arise, and emotions grow more powerful, effective skills are necessary for psychological survival. Generating positive emotions will be covered in a later chapter. We will begin discussing how to cope with negative emotions.



Stage 1: Expressing Feelings

Strong negative emotions are generally not taken care of immediately but are approached in stages. Stage 1 is not so much about fixing problems as it is about calming the brain. This makes sense biologically as the logical system and the emotional system have an inverse relationship. As one goes up in energy, the other goes down. Thus, when we are emotional, it can be very difficult to think clearly. Now for women, calming down often means sharing feelings with a friend. Men

might consider doing this more often. Other ways to calm oneself are to exercise, get out in nature, do yoga, or meditate. Expressing emotions in other ways can be helpful as well. This might include writing feelings down, doing art, dancing, or listening to music. Sometimes we talk out loud to ourselves!

If by chance some solution to the problem connected to the negative emotions pops up, then we are free to happily move on. However, modern life is complicated, and often there is no immediate answer to the issues we stress about. Stage 1 is always optional and dependent upon our needs. We may not be so distressed that we feel our cognitive abilities or perspective are compromised, and expressing our emotions may not seem necessary. In stage 2 we can begin to accommodate these problematic thoughts more cognitively.

Stage 2: Accommodation

It would be wonderful if we could just wish negative emotions away, but they seldom cooperate. One of the best and worst features of human beings is that when we have a problem, we often cannot stop thinking about it. Our inner fantasy is that we can fix any problem just by thinking about it intensely. Accommodating our emotions helps us carry on with our life duties and pursuits as we seek solutions to our concerns. Following are a few ideas about how to make room for negative thoughts when they persist.

Defusion Techniques

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was developed by psychologist Stephen Hayes.² In his view, it is better to accept your negative thoughts and emotions as part of your experience, but to not pay them undue attention. Instead, the focus should be to move on to constructive value-based actions. Defusion techniques help people to change their relationship with their thoughts versus trying to control them. Defusion techniques can serve as a good initial step toward managing the chaos inside. Here are some examples.

Picture your thoughts floating away into the sky in the basket of a hot air balloon.

Repetition. “Apple, apple, apple...”, or “desk, desk, desk...”

Noticing the thoughts. “I notice I’m having the thought that...”

Sports play-by-play announcer. “It’s the top of the fifth inning. Joe is having a meltdown.”

Thank your mind. “Thank you mind for that interesting thought.”

Naming the story. “Here is another ‘I am such a failure’ story.”

Say the thoughts ultra-slow or fast, or in a silly voice.

The Contemplation Period

We can make ourselves miserable by straying from the present and dwelling too much on problems. People can easily fall into a trap of feeling sad, angry, or guilty about the past and anxious or hopeless about the future. We can change our mood by choosing how much time to spend thinking about our issues. A focused 15-minute contemplation period is recommended. This time is used to feel emotions and to come up with solutions to problems. It is OK to have more than one contemplation period, but it is suggested that the total be less than one hour per day.

This technique is surprisingly helpful, but it may take a week or two to adequately train your subconscious to cooperate with the concept. The beauty of the method is finding consistent relief from stress without having to necessarily solve each problem. Say the following message each time you are ready to switch from problems to peace.

Message to the emotional system “OK that’s enough on this problem. We can’t do anything about it right now. Let’s keep busy and move on. We are trying to have a good day. We can think more about this issue tomorrow (tonight).”

Staying in Touch

Emotions are produced by the emotional system’s perceptions of life experiences. The conscious mind helps interpret many of these experiences and contributes to the mix. Since these reactions are subconscious, retrieving them is a skill we must develop. A detached family style or trauma can contribute to people not being fully in touch with their feelings. Therefore, awareness of subconscious thoughts is an essential aspect of emotional processing. If we do not know what is bothering us, we cannot work with it. The “magic list” method can be used to understand what lies within. Tension and depression are important clues that deeper feelings and thoughts are disturbing us beneath our awareness. This method works quite quickly, and within minutes people can usually figure out what is bothering them.

The Magic List Method

1. Tell your inner self you would like to know what the issues of concern are.
2. Write on a piece of paper the five greatest possibilities for what could be bothering you. Be creative and try to not censor anything.
3. Slowly read the list out loud to yourself.
4. As you read the list, note which issues bring forth the greatest levels of emotion. (This is how the inner self communicates about its troubles.)

Action Plan

1. During the next week, experiment with using the contemplation period, defusion techniques, and the magic list method. Give it a real try as these are your emotional survival tools.

Notes

1. Daniel Goleman. *Emotional Intelligence*. (New York: Bantam Books, 2006)
2. Stephen C. Hayes, Kirk D. Strasahl, & Kelly G. Wilson. *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change*. (New York: Guilford Press, 2016).

Picture 1 “Numerous family on whitewater,” 24 October 2015, photo by ammmmit, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 87800978.

Chapter 6

Coping Skills (Part B)

The Power of Thoughts



We all have the ability to dramatically transform our lives. The main ingredient in this process is the purposeful changing of thought patterns. It is invaluable to learn that it is not events that cause our emotional responses, but how we choose to think about those situations. Distortion and exaggeration can make problems appear far worse than they actually are. A person who tells himself he will “never get a job” or that he will “always be depressed” may experience those thoughts as true. It is always our perceptions, even if brief or below our awareness, that produce the subsequent emotions.

It is neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.

- William Shakespeare

The proposed thought management goal is to transform negative thoughts to the point that they cease to be of great concern. Many see this as almost impossible, but it becomes very achievable when the proper principles are put into play. The first concept to appreciate is that negative thoughts are triggered more by the perceptions of the emotional mind than the conscious logical mind. The second principle is that when human beings are upset, the critical factor is invariably thinking errors, and not the situation that triggered the emotions. Here is an important passage of scripture that attests to the difficulty human beings have with reasoning.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

The challenge when struggling with emotions is to assist the emotional mind to think more accurately. This leads to the third principle. The logical mind is able communicate with the emotional mind and alter its perceptions. This is called self-talk. We do it all the time, but unfortunately our self-talk is not always effective. Convincing the highly reactive inner self to let go of its dramatic thinking is a bit of an art form. Two very effective cognitive tools will be introduced now to help the reader develop more expertise in the great challenge of changing thoughts and feelings.

Radical Acceptance

There is a key to understanding why people suffer so much mentally and emotionally. We make ourselves miserable mainly by trying to mentally *control* our earthly reality. Negative thoughts come from the reaction of the emotional mind to things not going right. Behind every negative emotion is a frustrated desire.

Buddha named “selfish desire” as the main cause of emotional suffering 3,000 years ago. He said that when people become overly focused on worldly goals and pleasures, they end up sad and frustrated when things do not work out. Buddha therefore proposed that most pain could be eliminated by letting go of desires. He exhorted people to focus on living in a righteous and positive manner, to practice meditation, and basically give up the world. Fortunately, it is not necessary to

live like a Buddhist monk to take advantage of this superb concept. The Serenity Prayer, originally written by Reinhold Niebuhr, advises in this way, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Misery comes when we struggle to change the world, not by outward actions, but in our minds!

The best way to overcome mental suffering is to avoid the fantasy of trying to mentally control your environment and life course. It is better not to stress about things we have no control over. Acceptance is our primary weapon against negative thinking! When upset ask first, “What must I accept?” Once you courageously accept the present, you can patiently seek effective ways to improve your circumstances. Additionally, one can elegantly strive to find a positive in every difficulty.

One term that has evolved out of the Buddhist tradition to describe this focus on accepting reality is “radical acceptance.” The LDS way of practicing radical acceptance is accepting the truth. Doctrine and Covenants 93:24 says, “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.” Acceptance does not mean being totally resigned. The Serenity Prayer petitions the Lord that we might have “the courage to change the things we can.” This implies planning and action.

Don’t Worry, Be Happy

Radical acceptance does take some serious reflection to understand, and much emotional resolve to practice. Human beings do not like to face difficult truths, such as the fact that we have limited control over events and other people. Things are the way they are, and not so often the way we prefer.

<u>Situations in Which to Use Radical Acceptance</u>	
Guilt about past actions	Past difficult events or circumstances
Anxiety about the future	Limitations of present life situation
Personal inadequacies	Anger about others’ negative behavior

Here are some examples of using radical acceptance. Pay close attention because given the nature of the world, we will use this tool more than any other. When we are anxious, we do not want to accept that unpleasant things could happen to us. For instance, when students have a big math test coming up the next week, their anxiety is based on the fear is that they might get a low grade. They must accept that there is a possibility that they could receive a C or D, and they would have to deal with it. They would then have to study harder for the next one, or possibly go to a study lab and get extra help. However, since the test has not yet happened, the focus should be to study diligently and get the best possible grade.

I have suffered many calamities in my life, most of which never happened.

-Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)

Another example to consider is the common problem of low self-esteem. People feel bad about themselves because they are not as good or skilled as they would like to be. They often use the word “should,” as in “I should be more successful in my career.” However, our desires to instantly be more proficient, good, or wise are merely fantasies. It is important to accept the reality of our limitations since getting sad or upset does not change anything. This is called humility.

Rather than being self-critical or comparing oneself to others, we can choose to focus only on becoming more effective in our behaviors.

Consider the problem of anger. When we are angry, we struggle to accept that others are not ready or willing to live by the standards of conduct we believe in. These inner thoughts are more of a wish than a realistic possibility. Other people are not running around trying to understand and then live by the "rules" we have set up for their behavior. It is a fantasy that other people will act the way we think they should. In short, getting angry is often the result of a vain wish to control our environment. It is a waste of time and energy to be judgmental and zero in on the fact that someone did something wrong. It is much more helpful to accept that people act *the way they really are*. We would all do well to eliminate the word "should" from our vocabularies and substitute the phrase "I wish." The more aligned with reality we are, the better we do emotionally.

The first step in letting go of anger is to accept that people are doing their best given their values, level of knowledge, and self-management skills. The next step is to look at those who have offended us with eyes of compassion and to try to understand their pain or point of view. If we need to communicate or set boundaries, we can do so with kindness.

The Editing Technique

Man's nature is to strive mightily to change the world to suit his desires and fantasies. We hold tightly to our belief that happiness is tied to our script of how things must and should be. The great majority of negative emotions are closely connected to our ineffectual strivings to mentally *control* our environment. We make ourselves miserable by using dramatic repetitive self-talk in response to perceived problems. Peace comes from seeing things the way they really are. The editing technique is designed to change our very desire to indulge in negative thinking.

Let virtue garnish your thoughts unceasingly. (D&C 121:45)

To help analyze self-defeating thought patterns, a list of four principal *thinking errors* has been constructed. These thinking errors have a major impact on the production of negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger.

THE FOUR GREAT THINKING ERRORS

Exaggerating



How big??

Labeling



Labels are for soup cans, not people.

Not accepting reality



I can't believe people are such terrible drivers!

Predicting



100% accurate?

The editing technique takes more effort than the other techniques previously provided, but it is well worth the investment. By fighting thinking errors with truth, you can change your emotional reaction to difficulties. You will find that you will lose the desire to dwell on problems after processing them with this method. That may seem like a magical promise, but it is true. Follow the instructions exactly the first few times or more and write it all out. After that you will likely be able to do it in your mind. Make sure to read your corrected message a full five times as that is what makes it work. The subconscious seems to need to hear reality several times before it will accept it.

Instructions for the Editing Technique

1. Write out your distressing thoughts about the present problem.
2. Cross out lines that contain the thinking errors of exaggerating, labeling, denial of reality, or predicting as shown above.
3. Write the issue of concern in more accurate terms using the following Key Thoughts Guide.
4. Then read the new corrected statements at least *five* times.

Key Thoughts Guide

- a. What are some logical and rational statements I can make to help me view this problem more clearly?
- b. Am I being positive in my attitude? What are some encouraging declarations I can make? What are some of my personal strengths that will help me to overcome this challenge?
- c. If the worst did come to pass, how could I best handle it?

Staying Positive

Once we recognize the great significance of our thoughts, we then have the power to begin taking control of our emotions, and ultimately our lives. However, it is not enough to just be logical in our thinking. It is quite advantageous to be POSITIVE. We need to learn to notice what is good, recognize our strengths, and believe in a bright future for ourselves. Positive thinking means to downplay the negative and to be optimistic in one's attitude of mind. These skills do not generally come naturally but must be developed. Gaining a true and tested belief in the power of positive thinking is the gateway to emotional health and happiness.

Principles of Positive Thinking

- Principle #1 - Focus on others' good qualities.
Principle #2 - Do not let negative thoughts limit your vision.
Principle #3 - Believe you will succeed at your goal and try, try, try.
Principle #4 - Find something positive in every situation.

Thought is the sculptor who can create the person you want to be.

Henry David Thoreau

Beliefs and the Subconscious

There is a new emphasis in psychology on understanding *schemas*, fixed inner beliefs about self or life. Experienced psychotherapists know that these conditioned ideas are highly resistant to change. Problems generally have their roots in inner decisions we made as children in response to our interpretations of painful events. These thoughts became firmly entrenched in the subconscious and continue to exert their negative influence throughout the course of the person's lifetime.

I will never have friends. I am stupid. I am no good. I will always be depressed. I am unlovable. I cannot change. I cannot do anything right.	I will never be successful. My sins can never be forgiven. I am unworthy unless I have my parents' approval. Even if I improve, I know something else will go wrong. I do not deserve to be happy.
--	--

Notice how these statements tend to be absolutes. They can easily become self-defeating prophecies because our actions tend to follow our beliefs. Negative schemas have a tremendous influence upon our lives. They must be reckoned with, or we will make the same mistakes over and over again. This short manual is meant to provide an overview of the change process and is not a comprehensive work. Specific techniques for overcoming negative beliefs are provided in the Next 12 Steps book, which can be accessed for free in PDF form on the website — <https://www.recoveryLDS.com/>. For those who have friends or family who want to learn better coping skills, but do not have a pornography problem, I would recommend my book *How to Train an Elephant*, which can be found on the website — <https://copingskills101.net/>.

Action Plan

1. Practicing the tools provided in this chapter is critically important. The goal is to become adept at using the right tool for the demands of each situation. The *Coping Tool App* is a downloadable PDF document you can keep as a file on your phone for easy access. It can be found on the recoveryLDS.com website. It contains all these tools and some other helpful concepts. Because there is so much to practice, it will have to be spread out over several weeks. Please be diligent in this assignment. It is your opportunity to become a coping superstar!

Notes

Picture 1 “Thinking mechanism,” 19 July 2015, photo by Sergey Nivens, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 78335386.

Picture 2 “Great Dane looking at a French bulldog puppy,” 25 July 2015, photo by lifeonwhite, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 78864094.

Picture 3 “Can of Campbell’s Soup,” 27 January 2014, photo by @dcwcreations, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 39633259.

Picture 4 “Angry Driver,” 23 January 2010, photo by , standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 1784393.

Picture 5 “Fortune Teller,” 7 July 2011, photo by @Petesloutos, royalty-free license purchased from Dreamstime.com, photo file ID 9545594.

Chapter 7

Self-Care

The concept of the dual process mind was introduced in chapter 3. The emotional system, also known as system 1, is chiefly centered in the limbic system. This part of the mind has intelligence and awareness and manifests itself through impulses, desires, perceptions, and emotions. The “inner self” is largely preoccupied with its present experiences and fulfilling its desires. It boldly embraces life and all its diversity and pleasures. Creativity, passion, warmth, faith, and even wisdom come from this center of our being, the *heart* of man. These sparks from the heart make us feel alive and draw others to us. Though people may not realize this fully, the inner self appears to be the dominant player in the human personality.

And thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man. (Moses 6:65)

Inner Diplomacy

The conscious mind uses logical and supportive self-talk to manage mood and behavior. This skill is essential because the conscious mind and the inner self often have different ideas about things. The inner self tends to be impulsive and focuses on momentary pleasure while the conscious, logical mind takes a more practical long-range view. As we mature, there is an emphasis on being polite, controlling our emotions, studying hard in school, disciplining ourselves to work, and taking care of others. This ability to effectively suppress the desires of the inner self and do what society expects is a significant factor in successful living.



Achievement and self-control are good and essential, but they can be taken to extreme proportions. We can become overly socialized and learn to ignore the desires of the inner self. People may neglect to consider how they feel emotionally or what they really need. To make matters worse, there is little training available to help people learn to manage emotions effectively. We are left to figure out this essential part of being human on our own and stress is the consequence. Unfortunately, those with a pornography habit learn to deal with this tension by acting out. This produces unfortunate results. First, the desire to use pornography for relief becomes stamped onto the subconscious, and the impulse becomes automatic. Secondly, the normal push to find good coping mechanisms becomes subverted by learning to rely on pornography.

Of course, sin does not work out well in the long run. People who try to satiate themselves with pleasure are like men stranded on the ocean in a rowboat who drink salt water to quench their thirst. There is the illusion that they will obtain real satisfaction, but afterward they are more dehydrated and in need than before. Despite persistent attempts to find satisfaction in the wrong places, real joy always eludes those who try to take shortcuts to peace and happiness.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. (Proverbs 3:13-14)

The solution is to take a lesson from past experiences and get serious about learning how

to thrive emotionally. This particular skill could also be described as self-care. One thing I have learned about people struggling with pornography is that they are not very good at self-care, an essential element in learning how to have joy and be sober. Here is an example of poor treatment of self. I once had a client who said he was too busy to eat. His first meal of the day was generally at 8 PM. Perfectionism is another example of habitual mistreatment of self. Faulty self-care sets people up for backsliding since they have a hole in their emotional center that is never filled.

Good self-care involves listening to how you feel inside and then doing something about it. The goal is to have a healthy balance between the demands of society and relationships and your personal needs. Make a promise to yourself that you will take care of “you” every day. Avoid self-destructive patterns and find fulfilling work and activities to engage in. Create rich relationships because above all other things, the inner self needs love.

Other examples of good self-care are enjoying a hobby, positive self-talk, exercising, and eating healthy foods. Once we decide to begin nurturing ourselves, we communicate an inward message that we too are important. We will have more energy and renewed interest in life, as well as a greater capacity to love others. We must also keep good boundaries. Those who are constantly taking care of others can end up frustrated and burned out. Additionally, the body needs sufficient rest and relaxation, or it breaks down. Being kind to oneself is a good investment. It is not selfish. It is practical. It takes real wisdom to choose the right path.

And see that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order. (Mosiah 4:27)



Best Friends Forever

We are supposed to be friends with our inner self. I tell people to treat themselves as well as they would treat a best friend. That translates to being kind, supportive, and sensitive. When we are sensitive, we care about others’ feelings and want them to feel comfortable and respected. We are on their side and consistently willing to help them find success in every endeavor.

I realize some do not believe it is necessary to “pamper” themselves. However, please appreciate that the emotional system is far stronger than the logical system. If you do not treat yourself well, the inner self will rebel or get discouraged, and you will not like the consequences! One common example of the inner self losing interest in cooperating is burnout. Pornography use is a sign that the individual is not helping the inner self get its needs met appropriately.

Cognitive Wizardry

There is one other aspect of self-care that should be mentioned. It is the one that is the most easily overlooked. I am calling it cognitive wizardry because few can do it and it seems like magic. We need to learn how to make negative emotions disappear! It is common among people with negative habits to habitually suppress their emotions. However, as one former group member stated from his own experience, “The road to recovery does not go through numb.”



The inner self generates emotions in response to real-life events, thoughts, and perceptions. As discussed previously, many of these situations are beyond our control and negative feelings follow. Of course, human beings are very good at creating problems where there are none. For instance, sometimes we see people talking and assume they are saying critical things about us. At any rate, lingering negative emotions like anxiety, depression, and anger are very uncomfortable to bear. It's like having a pebble in your shoe or a bad headache!

When we are upset, the inner self expects its good and smart friend, the logical mind, to do something to relieve its pain. Think of how the inner self feels when its friend purposely distracts itself and ignores the problem. The conversation might go something like this: (Inner self) "Can't we do something about this problem? I'm dying here! What's the plan?" (Logical mind) "Sorry dude. I haven't a clue. I was going to play video games for a few hours to distract myself." The inner self, though impulsive, is clever. He knows that there are cognitive solutions to most problems. If you cannot fix it right away, or make a plan to fix it, you can at least find a different way to view the problem. Tools for doing this were provided in chapters 5 and 6. If you study and practice these skills, you can be an awesome protector for your emotional self. A magician in training is a good friend to have! I should mention that the inner self does not speak in words, more in feelings and perceptions that you can pick up if you are paying attention.

Substitution

Contrary to popular belief, compulsive pornography viewing is not just about sex. People who have difficulty stopping this habit have learned to use pornography for emotional regulation. When you combine the natural sex drive with inner urges for emotional release, you have a super strong force to manage. This is why people may feel they cannot control their actions.

Therefore, when individuals feel tempted, they will ideally ask themselves, "What is my real need? Think BLASTED – bored, lonely, angry, stressed, tired, empty, depressed. Then they can plan an appropriate strategy to meet that need appropriately. If this step is not learned, individuals are much less likely to fully recover. If you have a recovery partner, it is important that he or she know to ask you what is going on in your life and heart. Willpower is not enough!

A Question of Balance

Poor self-care is a habit. We have dozens of reasons why we cannot do positive things for ourselves. An important goal is to find balance in life. This means keeping our priorities straight, meeting our own needs, and not becoming overly fatigued or stressed. Maintaining balance is a lifelong challenge, but those with compulsive habits are particularly limited in this life skill. Having deficits in important life areas can contribute to negative habits by forcing the inner self to meet its needs in unhealthy ways. Consider which areas in the graph below you could do a better job with.

Family	Work	Recreation	Social
Spiritual	Exercise	Emotional	Diet and health

***It is only when you don't run from yourself that
you begin to get somewhere.***

-Author unknown

Action Steps

1. Ask yourself often as you go through your daily routine, “What am I really feeling?” or “What do I really want?” and resolve to appropriately meet more of your needs.

Notes

Picture 1 “Business man and mountain,” 9 July 2012, photo by @alphaspirit, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 11551096.

Picture 2 “Two young boys having fun on a tropical beach,” 5 November 2013, photo by Epic Stock Media, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 34826899.

Picture 3 “Illusionist hand making trick with wand,” 2 March 2019, photo by Sergey Nivens, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos for illustration purposes, stock image ID 248596136.

Chapter 8

Finding the Spiritual Path

Jesus Christ came to earth to fulfill several great purposes. First, he made an infinite sacrifice for the sins of mankind since we were not capable of fulfilling justice on our own merits. Secondly, he had the responsibility of teaching the pure gospel. He told parables, explained true principles, and taught from the scriptures. One other essential thing he did to cap his ministry was to be a perfect living example of how to lead the spiritual life. By showing us the way, he could then utter those immortal words, “Come, follow me.”

So, how would a person live if he were to focus on becoming more spiritual? I believe most would associate this goal with spending more time performing religious activities such as prayer, scripture study, and family history work, as well as developing more faith and providing service to others. Additionally, less time might be spent on worldly amusements. All these things are good and would certainly help bring more of the Spirit into one’s life. Nevertheless, spirituality goes deeper, and it is helpful to consider the other components of spirituality.

Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am. (3 Nephi 26: 27)

The More Abundant Life



Spirituality has dual aspects. Religious activity is one part, but the other is equally important. The second aspect of spirituality could be summarized as engaging in a positive lifestyle. Some elements of this lifestyle would be participating in constructive activities, strengthening relationships, and maintaining positive thoughts, emotions, and desires. These two aspects of spirituality are synergistic and complement and reinforce each other. Recovery is not just about letting something go, it is about embarking on a new way of life. A truly spiritual person would not need pornography and would be very willing to let it go. There are many scriptures that bring out additional aspects of spirituality to consider.

My favorite scripture is Doctrine and Covenants 121:45-46. Here the Lord suggests that we need to center on two main things to keep the Holy Ghost as our constant companion: being loving and kind toward others and maintaining positive, uplifting thoughts. He is trying to keep things simple by suggesting a daily focus on these two specific goals. Of course, they are challenging goals and require learning effective relationship principles and cognitive skills, and then practicing.

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. (D&C 121:45)

The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. (D&C 121:45-46)

One Day at a Time

It is easy to become overwhelmed with life and focus too much on all the problems. A different philosophy is to narrow it down and just focus on living this present day well. A helpful motto to consider is, “Do the next right thing.” Instead of trying to control your whole life, pay full attention to the experience or activity of the moment. This is called mindfulness. Mindfulness has been defined simply as living in the present moment non-judgmentally. Keep your thoughts off the past and the future and be in the present 95 percent of the time. Engaging in constructive activities creates positive emotions and disrupts negative thinking patterns. Love and serve those around you and find joy and purpose in each day. Gain the Spirit in the morning through prayer and scripture study and try to maintain those feelings throughout the day. As we live righteously moment to moment, we give the Lord a chance to help us grow into our best selves. Gradually the outer circumstances of our lives will change as well!

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galations 5:25)

Finding the Spiritual Path

How do you learn the skills to become more spiritual? I believe it is somewhat a “learn as you go” proposition. As soon as you have a desire to think and act more positively, you are ready to begin to engage in the process. There are many wonderful books that can be read. You will meet good people who will share their knowledge, wisdom, and support. Some basic concepts have been introduced in this manual that can provide a head start in this process of increasing your spirituality.

True spirituality requires filling our emotional reservoir with a continual stream of positive emotions such as love, peace, compassion, and joy. Setting a goal to be an influence for good to all those around us can bring about many personal rewards. Part of spirituality is acquiring the wisdom to know those activities, thoughts, and attitudes that are conducive to increasing our personal light and happiness. Learning to focus on those things which are good and beautiful helps us to stay on the right course.

The profound symphony of emotions that life brings us is what makes it all worthwhile. Nonetheless, life also brings harshness, anxiety, and tragedy. Individuals can dim their personal light by filling their spiritual reservoir with a preponderance of negative thoughts leading to emotions such as anxiety, anger, guilt, envy, and pessimism. Harsh speech, unkindness, gossiping, or an unwholesome overemphasis on sexuality also create negative feelings. These emotional miscues can have an adverse effect upon our overall spirituality. It is important to learn skills to minimize these negative feelings.

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;
And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;
And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.
For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren
nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)*

Use Faith to Overcome Doubt

I would like to suggest that God is wise, and he knows our hearts and what we are capable of. He does not expect us to change everything at once, or force ourselves unreasonably. He understands the need for each person to progress at a pace that fits them personally. He knows we need rest and recreation, and because he respects agency he does not desire to control our every action. I believe he just wishes we would trust him enough to try out his ways of doing things.

Over time as we try his ways, we will gradually become converted and willingly adjust our lifestyle. Here are some scriptures that illustrate God's patience.

But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words. (Alma 32:27)

For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, ⁹precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom. (2 Nephi: 28:30)

Be Kind to Yourself

Within the change process, it is good to practice self-compassion and take care of the needs of the inner emotional self. It is self-defeating to try to force ourselves to change. If we feel undue inner resistance, it is best to make the goal easier. The logical mind and emotional mind must work together. Maintain good nutrition, exercise regularly, and develop a social network. Find a proper balance between work, rest, and recreation. We cannot remain productive or effectively serve others if we are running on empty. Not meeting our basic needs or feeling hopeless about important life goals sets people up for discouragement. Discouraged people can feel tempted to fill up their emotional holes with pornography. If an individual cannot see solutions for long-term problems, counseling could be considered.

Keys to Spiritual Living

1. Values and principles - Strive to live according to higher laws. Treat all others and yourself with dignity and respect. Be an influence for good.

2. Meaning - Seek truth and knowledge and create a personal philosophy and lifestyle that suits your unique personality, talents, and interests.

3. Enriching daily activities - The "4 L's" can fill our hearts with positive emotions:

- *Love* is the royal emotion. Our ability to value and care about others has the greatest effect upon our disposition.
- *Labor* provides balance and focus, helps us to find meaning, and builds self-discipline.
- *Learning* is food for the soul. Gain knowledge through reading great books. Improve skills and talents and spend time contemplating important ideas.
- *Leisure* activities add to the joy in life and serve as a valuable mental release.

4. Centering activities - Meditation, yoga, prayer, reading in books of wisdom, music, and being out in nature all create feelings of inner peace.

5. Mindfulness - Savor each minute and every day through mindful living. Stay in the moment by using centering activities, the contemplation period, thought-stopping techniques, logic, and radical acceptance to divert attention from the negative.

6. Positive thoughts - Be optimistic, thankful, and compassionate in your outlook. See beauty and goodness in all your experiences. View difficulties as opportunities for learning and personal growth.

7. Detachment - Things do not have to be a certain way for us to be happy. We just *want* them to be different. It is fine to wish to have more as long as we also willing to strive to accept and be happy with what we have right now.

8. Wellness - Learn and follow the principles for maintaining good physical health so you can preserve your vital energy.

9. Service - Think beyond yourself. Render compassion and service to family, community, and the world.

10. Continual progression - Set goals small and great. Develop the skills of self-discipline. View personal progression as the central purpose of existence, the existential pearl of great price.

Spirituality takes up quite a large segment of the human experience. The dividends for following this path are large enough to engender a great enthusiasm for the journey once one gets a taste of the fruit. Deciding to be a more spiritual person is one of the greatest decisions any of us ever makes. Nothing will change lives more profoundly. The Lord calls this inner change “sanctification.” For those with a pornography habit, the benefits are two-fold. Not only will you find greater joy and meaning from the practice of spirituality, but you will have developed the tools to fully overcome the burden of this vexing sin.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:21)

Action Plan

1. Make spiritual living your greatest priority for one week. The simplest approach is to follow the counsel from Doctrine and Covenants 121 and focus on being loving and positive in your thoughts minute by minute and hour by hour. Practice makes perfect! Pray for the Lord to aid you and help you gain a testimony of this principle.

Notes

Picture 1 “Rainbow Falls waterfall,” 9 May 2017, photo by @MNStudio, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 152711428.

ADDENDUM

Post-Battle Analysis

Did I pray and read my scriptures?

Where was I?

How was my mood?

Was I tired or hungry?

Had I been productive?

What time of day was it?

What was my trigger?

What boundaries did I cross and what words of self-deception did I use for each wrong step?

Did I use the 60-second freeze?

Did I take out the Formula when I knew I was being tempted?

What tools could I have used?

Did I speak to one of my recovery partners?

If I won the battle, how would I have handled it?

What was the effect of giving in?

What was my real need and how could I have met it in a positive way?

What can I learn from this lapse?

The Next 12 Steps Daily Routine

Hit a Home Run Each Day

1st base: Prayer

2nd base: Scripture study

3rd base: Read in *The Seven Keys* manual or *The Next 12 Steps* manual or watch the YouTube videos

(Do a search on YouTube for Seigenberg step 1, Seigenberg step 2, etc.)

Home base: Read your Daily Plan (It is helpful to revise it at least monthly to keep it fresh and pertinent)

Daily Plan

1. Reasons to maintain sobriety: Positive goals dependent upon sobriety, eventual negative consequences if continue the habit, thoughts or quotes that inspire you (similar to the Emergency Kit)

2. Patterns: Note the most likely circumstances, time, place, and gradual steps to acting out so you can remain aware and interrupt the pattern.

3. Boundaries: Personal rules you choose to keep in order to remain sober; e.g. no Internet after 10 PM or avoid certain web sites.

4. Main *SNAP* issues to be aware of (Selective Need Assessment Protocol).
BLASTED (Bored, lonely, angry, stressed, tired, empty, depressed)

5. Recovery goals you want to work on: Spirituality, self-care, relationships, emotional coping skills.

6. Any other strategic or motivating thoughts.

The Formula

1. **Distract** Are you experiencing lustful thoughts or imagery? Use the coverup technique, sing a hymn, do neutral visual imagery, or engage in positive activities.
2. **Truth** Are you breaking any boundaries or thinking about doing so? Counteract any rationalizations and get to a safe place. Do the 60-second freeze. Read your emergency kit.
3. **Resolve** What's the real need (BLASTED)? What could you do to appropriately meet the need? What skills can you use to change any negative thoughts or feelings? (Use the Coping Skills App) *Seek support from recovery partners.*

Check-In Procedure (for spouses)

1. How are you doing today:

Physically?

Emotionally?

Spiritually?

2. What made you happy today?

3. What kinds of activities were you involved with?

4. Did you have any good social experiences?

5. Did anything interesting happen?

6. What might have frustrated you today?

7. Did you experience any anxiety or sadness?

8. *To the person with acting out concerns* What color are you today? Use the traffic light approach. *Green* means the person is stable (a good mood with no temptation), *yellow* signifies that there is moderate temptation or a significant mood problem, and *red* means danger zone (the person feels very agitated or temptation is high).

If you are feeling tempted what is the need? What activity or skills are you going to use to restore balance?

9. *To the non-offending partner* Have you felt triggered today by betrayal trauma? How can I help? Would you like to share your feelings? What skill might help you?

*Partners take turns sharing

- When sharing, try to keep it in the present for the most part. Avoid attacking or blame and share how you feel.
- Guidelines for listening: Do not interrupt, avoid being defensive, use empathy skills to validate feelings, do not say the other person should not feel that way, avoid giving directions or suggestions.
- Set an agreed upon time limit for sharing if that becomes an issue for either partner.