

# Recover

IN COMPASSION &  
FORGIVENESS



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# Introduction –

## BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

***“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”***

*Romans 8:18*

Beginning a long journey is often intimidating. It helps to know where you are headed. Recovery from pornography use is a long, emotional, mental, and spiritual journey—for both the user and the spouse or significant other. But like all earthly struggles, this journey is temporary.

Scripture is clear: there are no guarantees in this life except the love, forgiveness, and abiding presence of our God. Some earthly problems are resolved; others leave scars that remain until death. Yet even then, they go no further. Your recovery journey may end with a restored relationship or marriage. It may also end with a separation or divorce. Scripture does not promise a particular earthly outcome. What it does promise is that every tear will be wiped away and every relationship will be made whole when we reach our heavenly home. When weariness threatens to knock you off course, keep that destination in view.

This book exists to give hope to couples whose relationships have been damaged by pornography. The work of sorting through wreckage and resisting Satan’s accusations can drain hope quickly. But there is one hope Satan cannot touch: Jesus’ unshakable promise that we belong to him and that our present suffering will not have the final word.

This book is not a checklist or a therapeutic manual. We are not clinicians. We are fellow Christians who have walked this road and learned—sometimes painfully—along the way. Our aim is pastoral: to share what God’s Word, lived experience, and the wisdom of others have taught us, especially the comfort of the gospel meeting us in very real need.

### THE STAGES OF GRIEF

When pornography use comes to light, couples often experience grief similar to that which follows other significant losses. Trust is broken. Closeness feels threatened or gone. Alongside shock, anger, and confusion, grief is a natural and appropriate response to that loss.

While each person’s experience is unique, many find it helpful to recognize these common stages of grief:

- **Denial** – avoidance, confusion, shock, fear
- **Anger** – frustration, irritation, anxiety
- **Bargaining** – searching for meaning, telling one’s story, reaching out
- **Depression** – feeling overwhelmed, helpless, withdrawn
- **Acceptance** – exploring new options, moving forward with a new plan

These are not steps on a straight timeline. People move through them at different speeds, revisit stages, or experience several at once. By God’s grace, however, it is possible to emerge spiritually strengthened. For some, that will be in a rebuilt relationship; for others, in separate lives entrusted to the Lord.

## The Discovery

The moment pornography use comes to light can happen in many different ways. Sometimes the user confesses directly to a spouse or significant other. In other cases, the confession first happens with a pastor or counselor and is later shared within the relationship. Still other times, the discovery is unplanned: internet history is found, a device is checked, or someone is unexpectedly caught in the act. While these situations vary widely in their intensity and shock, the specific manner of discovery is far less important than how it is handled once it occurs.

The period immediately following discovery is often emotionally charged and deeply stressful for both people involved, though usually for very different reasons. Because of this heightened stress, emotions can swing quickly and unpredictably. The one who confesses may feel an intense sense of relief at no longer hiding a secret, sometimes even bordering on euphoria. That relief can just as quickly give way to crushing shame—shame before God, shame over the damage caused, and fear about what lies ahead.

The betrayed partner often experiences a very different emotional storm. Shock is common, followed by disbelief and disorientation. What once felt stable may suddenly feel unreliable. Questions arise immediately, even if words are hard to find. In these early moments, both people are vulnerable, exhausted, and easily overwhelmed.

Because of this, Scripture’s guidance for communication is especially important at this stage:

***“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”***

*Proverbs 15:1*

***“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”***

*James 1:19*

The first conversations after discovery often set the tone for everything that follows. Anger, especially in response to betrayal, may be unavoidable. Yet anger does not need to be expressed through harsh words or reckless accusations. When conversations escalate quickly, they can become the wedge that drives a couple further apart rather than the doorway toward healing.

Even when communication remains calm and forgiveness is verbally affirmed, serious internal struggles often continue beneath the surface. For the one who has sinned, shame can become spiritually paralyzing. A common fear is that the relationship will ultimately end—not because forgiveness is withheld, but because the damage feels impossible to overcome. While that fear is understandable, this early stage is not the time to draw final conclusions. Future hopes, fears, and outcomes are best placed in the Lord’s hands rather than decided in the heat of initial pain.

On the other side, the betrayed partner may move into a period of denial or emotional numbness. As part of this early grieving process, Satan often tempts them to believe that the betrayal reflects personal inadequacy—as though the sin occurred because they were not enough. These lies must be resisted. The cause of the sin rests with the sinner alone. For both people, clinging to Christ’s promise that he will never leave or forsake his people is essential in enduring the shock of discovery.

This stage is not about solving everything or mapping out the future. It is about surviving the initial impact with honesty, restraint, and dependence on God’s mercy. Healing work will come later. For now, the Lord’s presence is enough to carry both hearts through the first, painful moments.

## Damage Control

After the initial shock of discovery begins to wear off and the intensity of anger lessens, many couples enter a season that feels uncertain and unstructured. The question that often surfaces—sometimes out loud, sometimes silently—is simple and heavy: What now? This stage can feel unsettling because the old normal is gone, but a new one has not yet taken shape.

At this point, Satan often whispers that pornography is a victimless sin, especially when there was no physical affair. Scripture tells a different story. The damage caused by pornography is real, and its effects ripple outward—into trust, intimacy, communication, and spiritual life. This is the stage where couples begin to wrestle honestly with what the sin has done and what must be addressed going forward. That wrestling often takes the form of

bargaining: searching for meaning, assessing consequences, and trying to limit further harm.

One of the most important tools during this stage is learning to properly distinguish between God's law (his unyielding expectations) and God's gospel (his unconditional forgiveness)—and to apply each where it belongs. This is not merely an academic exercise. It has direct, practical implications for questions such as: What does repentance look like now? What boundaries are loving and necessary? How can trust even begin to be rebuilt?

God's law speaks with clarity and seriousness about sin. It names wrongdoing honestly and exposes the depth of the damage. God's gospel speaks with equal clarity about forgiveness, restoration, and Christ's finished work. When law and gospel are confused—when forgiveness is used to minimize sin, or when consequences are treated as punishment rather than care—additional harm is often done. When they are rightly distinguished, however, they become powerful instruments of healing.

Scripture provides many examples of this pattern. King David's sin with Bathsheba carried real and painful earthly consequences (2 Samuel 12). God did not minimize David's wrongdoing. At the same time, David was not abandoned. Psalm 32 bears witness to his confidence in God's forgiveness, even while living with the aftermath of his sin. Remarkably, God brought blessing even out of that brokenness, using David and Bathsheba's son Solomon in the line that would eventually lead to Christ. God's mercy did not erase consequences, but it did redeem the story.

Other biblical accounts reflect the same law-and-gospel clarity in situations of sexual sin:

- The woman at the well (John 4)
- The woman caught in adultery (John 8)
- Paul's pastoral correction and later restoration of a repentant sinner (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2)

It can be helpful—individually, but preferably together—to read these passages and ask what is law and what is gospel. Even within the law, Scripture speaks in two distinct ways: first, to expose sin and our need for a Savior; and second, to guide forgiven people in lives shaped by gratitude and love. Learning to hear these differences takes time and humility.

Because this discernment is difficult, God often provides help through others. Pastors, Christian counselors, and mature believers can serve as guides during this stage. In our own experience, both individual and joint counseling proved invaluable. Counseling helped us recognize that we were carrying different burdens and grieving on different timelines. It also reminded us that God had already taught us something important earlier in our marriage—when we lost our first child to stillbirth—about how differently two faithful people can grieve the same loss. That earlier lesson became a quiet source of wisdom in a new crisis.

A brief word about counseling is necessary. Finding the right counselor can take time. Connection and trust matter. While professional competence is important, shared faith is often essential. Secular counseling frameworks frequently lack the categories of sin, grace, repentance, and forgiveness that are central to spiritual healing. A counselor who understands the gospel is far better equipped to walk with Christians through this terrain.

Alongside counseling, several practices play a vital role in limiting further damage and nurturing spiritual health. Regular worship, Scripture reading, and Bible study—both personal and communal—place us where the Holy Spirit has promised to work. Shame often tempts people to withdraw from these means of grace, whispering that they are unworthy or will be judged. These lies must be resisted. Christ invites sinners, not the self-sufficient.

One practice deserves special mention: praying out loud together as a couple. For many, this feels awkward or vulnerable at first. Yet shared prayer often becomes a place where honesty deepens and defenses soften. Speaking openly to Jesus in one another's presence can defuse temptation early and prevent unspoken fears from growing in the dark. Over time, this practice can quietly rebuild trust. Many couples find that the health of their relationship rises and falls with the faithfulness of their shared prayer life—not because prayer earns God's favor, but because it keeps both hearts turned toward him.

This stage is not about fixing everything at once. It is about limiting further harm, learning to speak truth with care, and placing the broken pieces where God can begin his restoring work. The next chapter will turn more directly to the slow and demanding task of rebuilding trust.

## Rebuilding Trust

Rebuilding trust is often the most difficult and time-consuming part of recovery after pornography use is discovered. Forgiveness, for Christians, is not optional. Jesus calls his people to forgive as they have been forgiven. Trust, however, is different. Trust cannot be commanded, rushed, or demanded. Once it has been broken, rebuilding it is slow, fragile work, and in some cases, it may not be fully possible.

The work of rebuilding trust often overlaps with both the bargaining and depression stages of grief. Hope and discouragement can exist side by side. Couples may find themselves making progress one week and feeling set back the next. This unevenness is not a sign of failure; it is part of the reality of healing from betrayal.

Because trust-building is so central to recovery, what follows draws not only from our own experience but also from the wisdom of counselors and others who have walked this road.

# Consistency Over Time:

## ACTIONS MATTER MORE THAN WORDS

One of the first lessons many learn in recovery is that trust is rebuilt through consistent action over time, not through promises or explanations. Trust is easily destroyed in a single moment, but it is rebuilt slowly, almost imperceptibly, day by day.

A helpful image is that of a rope made of many strands. One decisive cut severs every strand at once. Rebuilding that rope requires patiently laying down new strands, one at a time. Each day of honesty, follow-through, and reliability adds another fiber. In this context, even small things matter. If you say you will do something, do it. Repeated inconsistency—even in minor matters—reinforces the fear that trust is still unsafe.

Words still matter, but actions matter more. When someone has lived a double life, words alone carry little weight. Over time, however, consistent, observable change can begin to create space where trust may slowly grow again. It is also important to remember this: you cannot make another person trust you. Your responsibility is faithfulness, integrity, and transparency. Whether and when trust returns belongs to the other person.

## Radical Honesty

This conversation is often only the beginning. Healing unfolds over time, and because betrayal is rooted in deception, rebuilding trust requires a radical commitment to honesty. For someone accustomed to hiding, this level of transparency can feel uncomfortable or even humiliating. Yet it is necessary.

Couples do well to speak openly about what the betrayed partner needs to know. Once those expectations are clearly stated, the responsibility of the offending partner is to honor them fully. This includes sharing struggles, temptations, and failures rather than concealing them. In the aftermath of betrayal, the right to privacy is necessarily limited. This is not punishment; it is an expression of respect for the dignity and healing of the betrayed person.

At this stage, trust is not required, but honesty is.

## DISCLOSURE

For healing to begin, the betrayed partner needs to know the truth about the extent of the betrayal. When significant information is withheld, the foundation of recovery remains unstable. If new details emerge later, trust is often shattered all over again, sometimes more severely than before.

For this reason, a structured disclosure process—ideally guided by a trained counselor—is strongly recommended. Done poorly, disclosure can retraumatize the betrayed partner. Done carefully, it can create a painful but necessary clearing where healing may begin.

It is important to recognize that trauma cannot be rushed. There is nothing the betrayer can do to speed up another person's healing, but there is much that can slow it down, such as minimizing the harm, rationalizing behavior, or trying to move the relationship forward before the injured person is ready. Healing requires patience.

## Regular Check-Ins

Predictable routines help restore a sense of safety. Many couples benefit from scheduled, weekly check-ins that provide a structured space for honest communication.

There are many ways to structure these conversations. One example is a simple check-in that allows each person to share feelings, affirmations, needs, personal responsibility, and current struggles. The purpose of these conversations is not to fix problems or debate details, but to listen attentively and receive one another's words. Topics that need further discussion can be addressed later.

## Professional Support

Rebuilding trust without outside help is extremely difficult. A counselor provides perspective, accountability, and guidance that couples cannot generate on their own. While no counselor is a perfect fit for everyone, taking the time to find someone trustworthy and competent is a worthwhile investment in healing.

## Transparency and Accountability Tools

Accountability software and monitoring tools can support recovery when used appropriately. These tools work best not as policing mechanisms, but as safeguards that help interrupt destructive habits and reassure the betrayed partner that protective boundaries are in place.

No tool can replace genuine repentance or integrity. Anyone determined to hide will likely find a way around technological barriers. But when a person is sincerely committed to change, such tools can be a meaningful aid.

## Final Reflections on Trust

Rebuilding trust after pornography use is slow, demanding work. Some couples will discover that trust can be rebuilt and even strengthened over time. Others may find that the damage is too great to repair. In either case, God's grace remains.

Trust grows strand by strand, sustained by honesty, patience, and care. Whether reconciliation ultimately occurs or not, the Lord does not abandon those who seek him in the midst of brokenness.

# A New Normal

Over time, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, a path forward begins to take shape. That path is not the same for every couple. In some cases, it leads toward a restored relationship. In others, it leads toward separate lives lived faithfully before God. This chapter does not attempt to predict or prescribe outcomes. Instead, it acknowledges a difficult but necessary truth: after betrayal, life does not return to what it was before.

What existed prior to discovery cannot simply be recovered. The old normal is gone. A new reality must be faced and, over time, embraced. That does not mean the new normal is without hope. It means hope takes a different shape than it once did.

Because every situation is unique, wise spiritual guidance is essential. A pastor who knows Scripture and is attentive to the specific circumstances can help couples discern faithful next steps. This guidance may involve careful consideration of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and—when marriage is involved—the serious and sober question of whether biblical grounds for separation or divorce are present. These decisions are never simple, and they should not be made in isolation.

Whatever the outcome, both individuals are changed by the experience. The one who betrayed trust often carries a heightened awareness of temptation and a deeper dependence on God's grace. The one who was betrayed gains an intimate understanding of what forgiveness truly costs and of what it means to live by mercy rather than control. Neither insight is easy.

But Scripture reminds us that God does not waste even the most painful experiences:

***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”***

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

Whether a couple remains together or not, God can use what has been endured to shape wisdom, humility, and compassion. Those who have walked this road often find themselves better equipped to recognize pain in others and to offer care without judgment.

For couples who do move forward together, trust is often fragile for a long time. It requires continued attentiveness, honesty, and patience. Progress may be slow, and setbacks may still occur. Yet some couples discover that, over time,

trust—though different than before—can grow strong and resilient. This chapter does not promise resolution. It offers something quieter but more reliable: the assurance that God’s grace accompanies his people into whatever future unfolds. The new normal may be difficult, but the Lord remains present, faithful, and at work.

## It Takes Three

**“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”**

*Ecclesiastes 12:4*

Through the entire process, Jesus is the key. This cannot be overstated. If Jesus is truly present in the individuals involved, anything is possible. He motivates the betrayer to fight to live up to the righteousness that has been freely given by Christ’s life and death. Similarly, he motivates the betrayed to forgive the way God has forgiven us for Jesus’ sake. There is no greater motivation than that which stems from the gospel. Earthly factors may play a role, but only Jesus miraculously changes hearts and lives from the inside out.

Let’s reiterate the actions that make sure our lives are filled with Jesus.

- He is present in His Word and sacraments. Get to worship frequently. Experience the tangible reminder of his real presence in the Lord’s Supper. Set aside time to dive into God’s Word both personally and with others (bible studies, small groups, etc.).
- He is present in the loving support of reliable Christian friends and family, especially in those that can provide a sounding board and help keep us accountable in our actions.
- He comes to those who ask and seek. Use prayer often, almost like a running conversation with Jesus throughout the day as time allows. Pray as a couple out loud together at least once a day, laying out your struggles, asking him for strength, and thanking him for any victories no matter how small.

One of the hidden blessings of couples forced to confront porn use in their relationship is that the process trains them to find healthy ways to address conflict that can arise from any number of other sources. It also prepares individuals or couples to be able to comfort others with the comfort they themselves have received. Leave it to our almighty God to take such a hurtful situation and twist it to bring good out of it.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (*Romans 15:13*)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This eBook was a collaboration of several authors who have asked to remain anonymous because of the nature of the experiences they shared in this eBook.

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