

Internet Pornography Testimony

In The Message translation of the Bible, Luke 8 quotes Jesus, *"A farmer went out to sow his seed..." "And the seed that fell in the weeds - well, these are the ones who hear, but then the seed is crowded out and nothing comes of it as they go about their lives worrying about tomorrow, making money, and having fun."* The New International Version of the Bible gives that last verse as this, *"They (the ones who hear but do nothing) are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."*

During my early adult years, this pretty much describes me.

As a young boy I developed an understanding of who God is, but in my young adult life I did little to acknowledge Him. It wasn't until I had a family and had finished college that I acknowledged that I wanted a closer relationship with Him. I don't think I knew where that would lead, exactly; I just remember saying it in a new members class in small church my wife and I started to attend.

Since that time, God has used circumstances to draw me closer to him; He wanted me to put Him on the throne of my life, not just be a small part of my life.

But me, I was stubborn. I relied on my own hard work to see me through. But in my case, none of that ever worked like I planned. I wound up relying on family, mostly my father, my friends or just plain luck to rescue me. Let me tell you about my background: I lived a "Leave It To Beaver" existence as a boy. I was raised in a small mid-west town in the corn-belt. It doesn't get more classic than this.

My father was a prominent physician in town. My mother was the church lady with a heart of gold. Both my parents came from nothing, worked their way through college, and wanted to give their family stability, opportunity and the life they never had in their growing up years.

I was the third of three sons and I took after my mother in a lot of ways. I enjoyed sports, but never amounted to much of an athlete. I was tricked into playing the piano, then violin. If I took lessons we would get rabbits. The lessons lasted longer than the rabbits. I think that was planned.

We lived near a large forested city park and I felt most alive when I was outdoors, playing in the creek, digging caves, exploring the dump. I was always up for an adventure.

I enjoyed going to church; it was a fun place and people knew me. At one time, I thought about becoming a priest. We were Methodist, so that didn't work out.

I loved Boy Scouts and Indian lore; they became my life as I grew older. The Scouts gave me a strong sense of honor and duty, along with my church experi-

ence.

Today, during my low times, I really long to go back to that time in my life.

As a child I learned that: Everything revolved around my father and his work. That always came first. What he said went, how he saw things was the way it was. I was usually a very compliant kid. Mostly, I did what he wanted me to do.

I learned that church was the women and children's domain. Men attended on Sundays, but only if they didn't have sick patients in the hospital. My dad usually did.

All that was necessary to be successful in life, all I had to do was to try harder. In my case that usually meant school. There was a time I really thought the first son got lots of smarts; he now is a PhD, the next son got a few less, he is an M.D., and us third born got what was left—I am neither.

It was drilled into me that education was the key to success. My brothers and I were instilled with great expectations. You see every Sunday noon after dinner my father would sermonize about how hard he had it growing up because he came from nothing, how hard he worked, his family history, his friends from college and where they are today, the tragedies in his life, politics, and his philosophies of life. To this day I address him as the "Old Professor." As this played out in my life, my father was and still is the ultimate controller. What he said was the law, I don't remember him as a stern disciplinarian; I just wanted to please my dad.

My father was also the great rescuer. He had the means and he aided family members when situations were difficult. He aided my brothers, and more often than was good for me, he helped me and my family out financially. He was always my backup plan. Of course, there were always strings attached and unexpected consequences. There usually is, in any situation where God is not at the heart of it.

I learned that work meant 50-60 hours a week. Workaholism was a good and respected, even expected thing.

My older brothers were my heroes. I really looked up to them, was always comparing myself to them, and wanting to be like them.

As I look at it now, my life has been a struggle to find my own identity aside from my father's and my brothers. It has caused me to make choices in my life that were not appropriate; it has caused me to fall back on my father for rescue, instead of looking to my heavenly Father for understanding and direction. I didn't appreciate the spiritual gifts that God gave me nor make use of my talents in the beginning. I was trying to be someone I wasn't. What that has done is bring me failure after failure, heart break after heart break.

Now, one big success in my life has been my wonderful marriage to my wife. She has been an indescribable joy in my life. We have three children who mean

the world to us. It has been a rough ride at times, always drawing my wife and me closer together.

I have had many heart breaks in my life. My childhood dream of becoming a doctor, just like my dad, never came true. Being rejected for medical school was one of my biggest heart breaks.

On a positive note, I won the first draft lottery since the Civil War. While many of my friends were going on in college, I joined the Navy for four years.

My career as a health care administrator never really caught hold. The job that brought me to Tulsa evaporated after nine months. I was fired from my next job. In fact, I have been let go from at least six jobs through the years, not holding any job for more than two years.

I tried working for myself selling insurance and securities – I was terrified of cold calls. I loved the work and teaching people about financial planning, but I didn't make any money until they bought something, which they seldom did.

I had to take money from my father to support my family—after 18 months of little or no money coming in, I drove my wife to an anxiety attack.

I had other business ventures – all to no end.

I remember telling God that I finally give up. I remember finally relinquishing my career up to Him; I told God I would even work in a nursing home if that was what He wanted me to do. After making that spiritual decision, I was working within 30 days as the director of a large senior living property. I found that I enjoyed the work, especially the marketing and sales.

There were several jobs after that, and a stint as an independent consultant. Then I finally got an opportunity with a large company that wanted me to manage retirement property here in Tulsa. I thought that I finally had arrived.

But then, six months into the job, on Easter Day 2001, I suffered a heart attack. It was moderately severe, and the result was a damaged heart valve on the left side. That meant that I had greatly reduced blood circulation throughout my body, I was weak and could not deal well with the stress of work. Worst of all, in my mind, I was facing open heart surgery seven months later.

The day of the surgery came and I remember going to get prepped for surgery, thinking this might be how Isaac felt going up into the mountains with his father Abraham. It was like going to the sacrifice.

The surgery was successful, but there were two more emergency trips to the hospital. I have frequent flier miles with EMSA. With just six weeks of recovery, I felt I had to get back to work – I was pushing the envelope. When I went back to work I found I could tolerate even less stress and work than before. My ability to think as before was affected. Sometimes words wouldn't come out when I talked.

It was the result of having my heart stopped, and going on an artificial pump during the surgery. I had heard horror stories about that, and they seemed to be coming true for me.

Two weeks after I returned to work, it clear to me – and to my company - that I could not handle my work. I was terminated.

Today, I call it God's deliverance, because I would not ever quit. After all, I learned early on to just try harder.

Yet, during all of this I felt very close to God. I remember one day lying in the hospital feeling weak and very vulnerable. I turned the TV to a praise and worship show. They were singing all the great praise and worship songs I knew from church. I had church like I never had it before lying on my back in that hospital room. What sweet communion with God. It was like God reaching down in the midst of my suffering to bless me.

God blessed me again. One day after I was fired from my job, a friend from church hired me to work in a home health agency as an administrator. I took a week off to walk my daughter down the aisle at her wedding and to take a break. I had to take a one-third cut in pay and take a back seat in major decisions, but it has been a healing place for me, both physically and emotionally. I am happy to say that I still have that job—the longest I have held any in my life, nearly three years.

Enduring and then coming through my heart attack has been one of the pivotal times of my life. I saw with laser clear vision what the most the critical things in my life were—my relationship to God, the love of my life, my wife who went through it all with me, my children, my family and friends. It was not success in business, a big car, or a big bank account. None of what the world counts as success matters in the long run. I now consider my heart attack as the final step that God used to bring me to Himself. In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren writes, "You don't know that God is all you need until He is all you have!" My heart attack has been the most important "gift" I could have received.

I have been active in this very church for over 24 years. I have taught Sunday school, sat on committees, been involved with various ministries. But when Celebrate Recovery came along, I was strangely drawn to it. I joined a 12-step group so that I could help get the ministry off the ground. I wasn't sure what my issues were exactly, but figured what the heck.

The 12-step group set up a structure and expectations to go deeper in my self-inventory, a safe environment and supportive stepbrothers. We talked about things I had never heard talked about before in a church group.

I remember hearing a testimony from a man who talked about being deliv-

ered from pornography. I am sure my face was white as a ghost, I felt my face tighten, unsmiling.

One of the things I had heard in group was the saying, "You are as healthy as your secrets." Well, I had a secret—you see, I was involved with internet porn. When things didn't go well for me, I felt I deserved to treat myself. But I knew that gravity of my sin. I tried desperately to stop, again and again.

Exposing my secret seemed like a big risk for both me and my wife because of our life in the church. How should I deal with it?

In all of this, God was a gentleman. He said, "You do want to be a man after my own heart, don't you? What about your little secret? Could you talk about that here in the group?"

I said, "Yes, I think I could."

God said, "Of course, you need to talk with your wife first. She deserves that, you know, after all she has been through with you."

I said, "Yes, I know you are right." This conversation was not audible, but was very real just the same. God's Holy Spirit was talking directly to my spirit.

So, I did tell my wife my secret. It was one of the hardest things I ever did. Yes, she was surprised—you see I worked hard to hide it—and extremely hurt. But as we both have learned since then, my temptation to pornography did not mean that I wasn't happy with our love life or didn't respect and love my wife. For me it was vulnerability to the visual stimulation and gratification of pornography. A very powerful physical attraction, I imagine not much different from using drugs. It drew me back again and again, even though I knew it was sin, hurtful to me and my family. Without God's help through Celebrate Recovery, I don't think I could be free of it.

I have learned that pornography takes away from my focus on my wife, both sexually and emotionally. It was robbing her of something that Paul says very explicitly what belongs to her.

I have learned to bounce my eyes, to keep myself from getting visual gratification. To focus my attention on my wife. I will tell you that it is a daily battle; one that with God's help and continued healing in my life I know I have already won.

My testimony is a work in progress. Just the other day I was praying at the altar at the close of church. I was praying for my family. The spirit put the thought into my head, ", you need to encourage your dad." You see, my father is now 92, in frail health, but insists on continuing to be with my mother who is deep into the tunnel of Alzheimer's. My father has been many things to me in the past, but right now, he is a hero for that.

Putting things into words is a powerful healing experience. I remember in

Genesis 1, how God spoke the word, and it was so. He spoke, and the world was created. He spoke and the oceans and lands were formed. When I finally spoke the nature of my sin, I felt a power over it I hadn't felt before. Even putting this testimony down into words has been a spiritual journey for me.

Remember, "You never know that God is all you need until He is all you have." With little or no success in my career, the struggles in my family life, and a dirty little secret that by myself I just couldn't shake, and finally with my body physically broken and scarred, I have come to the **end of myself**. I have no more grandiose ambitions, I have little money in the bank to show for a lifetime of work. My house is not the glittering showcase set back on 25 acres that I envisioned years ago. My health is good, but I have no physical endurance. I have to limit what I do physically; my car is an '89 Dodge Caravan that leaks oil and the radio is broke.

In Psalms 51 we can see King David finally coming to the end of *himself*. He writes in verses 16-17, "*You would not be pleased with sacrifices, or I would bring them. If I brought you a burnt offering, you would not accept it. The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. A broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise.*"

I am finally at the end of myself, and it is a glorious, freeing, healing place to be.

God brought me back to an earlier love—nature. I have become a gardener. It is helping transform my life as well as my yard. I feel God's joy as well as my own when I work in the garden.

God has called me out of the "victim role" that I played a good deal of my life into the victor's role! Psalms 147:3 says, "*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*" My heart has been broken in more ways than one.

My identity is not my work. If it was, I could only be seen as a failure. But my identity is as a child of God with all the privileges and promises that come with that.

God has called me to look beyond myself to touch the lives of others, no matter the physical or emotional or even spiritual limitations that I may have. Psalms 70: 18 says, "*Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me.*" I intend to take Step 12 very seriously. God never wastes a hurt!!

I see my recovery as a lifelong task. My surrender to God is a daily ritual, because Satan attacks me on a daily basis. But I stand on God's word in Isaiah 1:18 that says, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool....For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*" I can stand on that because He spoke it.

You may be like me; you may have come to the end of the road, in your mind. You may have very little to show for a lifetime of work. Or maybe you have a dirty little secret that you wish would just go away. You may be totally alone, totally broken, totally humiliated. Praise God that you are at the end of yourself. But if Jesus is the Lord of your life we share this in common: *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* We are heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. Heirs to God's mercy, forgiveness, healing and an abundant life in this place and life never-ending with Him forever. If you want that in your life, there are people in this very room who will help you lay claim to God's promises this very hour. Get in touch with us after reading this and I or someone else will pray for you, NOW.

In Jesus' Name!! Amen.