I want to begin my talk today with a quote from Elder Ballard that he gave in this past priesthood meeting in October. He said, ""Brethren, today we are fighting a battle that in many ways is more perilous, more fraught with danger than the battle between the Nephites and the Lamanites. Our enemy is cunning and resourceful. We fight against Lucifer, the father of all lies, the enemy of all that is good and right and holy. Truly we live in a time of which Paul prophesied, when ‘‘men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.’’’’

Elder Ballard continues, ""Does this sound familiar, brethren? To me it sounds like a night of primetime television. These are ‘‘perilous times.’’ We battle literally for the souls of men. The enemy is unforgiving and relentless. He is taking eternal prisoners at an alarming rate. And he shows no sign of letting up."

President Monson also said during his address in that same priesthood conference, ""When I consider the demons who are twins — even immodesty and immorality — I should make them triplets and include pornography. They all three go together. In the interpretation of Lehi’s dream, we find rather apt description of the destructiveness of pornography: ‘‘And the mists of darkness are the temptations of the devil, which blindeth the eyes, and hardeneth the hearts of the children of men, and leadeth them away into broad roads and they perish and are lost.’’’"

Pornography does blind our eyes and harden our hearts, thereby shutting us down, making us less perceptible and available to one another. This shutting down that is happening to many of us is a serious condition. And I think it’s happening to all of us a little bit, because we live in a bit of a pornographic culture. How can we really see one another when our perceptions are so dulled? How can we face problems in our intimate lives when we are dull of spirit and insensitive to the world around us? In this bored and dulled state we seek more sensational entertainment, louder music, ever cruder sexual depictions, effusive and argumentative talk shows, more extreme reality programs to make us feel alive.

The title of our presentation today is _Awake My Soul!_. The cry of the gospel is to awake, to rise up from the dust and be men and women of God. I found the following definition of awake in the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, which says, ""The general concept of ‘‘awakening’’ captures the notion of either rousing oneself or being aroused in order to take action. Such calls to action are usually accompanied by urgency and intensity. It suggests an arousal from the passivity and vulnerability of sleep in order to seize the initiative, to take aggressive action.”’"
ever was a time we need to wake up and arouse ourselves and take aggressive action, it’s now, because as Elder Ballard said, ““We are battling for the souls of men and women.””

I want to continue with my presentation with a little history. I was driving home from Salt Lake City one Saturday afternoon, and I was listening to National Public Radio, and they had a segment called ““Sex and Technology.”” I thought it was really interesting and educational for me. They said that whenever there has been a breakthrough in communications technology, pornography has always had a pivotal role, that history suggests that communications technology and pornography go together like a hand in glove. Erotic engravings were traded throughout the ancient world, but it wasn’t much of a business — until the invention of the printing press. And when the printing press came into play, people began writing about pornography and selling it and making money from it. After movable type, the next leap was photography. So now you didn’t really even have to know how to read in order to indulge in pornography, and pornographic photography made photography a very viable and lucrative field. And then after that it was the moving pictures. In 1894, the first public movie picture was made, and then in 1896, the first pornographic film was produced, and ever since that time, there have actually been more pornographic films produced than non-pornographic films.

So they were talking about, ““Well, what’s going to be the next big breakthrough in the porn industry?”” And the response was that there’s a lot of talk about the third generation wireless stuff, cell phones, about broadband cell phones, because you’ll have all the privacy and the access the Internet afforded you, but now you’ll have mobility, so you don’t have to sit in front of your computer at your desktop; you can go wherever you want in order to watch pornographic material. Anyplace you want to go and anyplace you might feel more comfortable, so there is actually a webpage that has a wireless Internet, it’s a wireless Internet webpage delivering full color erotic images and jokes capable for the Internet-capable mobile phone. The service is up now, and when the technology to deliver moving pictures arrives, this particular webpage will be the first to use it. So we’re talking about a thirty-second little pornographic movie, or a minute one, or a five-minute one, all kinds of things. So Brooke Gladstone, who was narrating this program, she said, ““If porn were a person, with such a record of fueling technological progress, he certainly would merit an award from at the very least the Chamber of Commerce, because as far as driving the modern economy, porn is better than sex.”” Then this other fellow responded, ““Cowboys in the 1800s in America would pay more for a picture of a naked woman than they would pay to have sex with a prostitute. If a cowboy would pay more for a picture of a girl than for sex with a girl, then the picture of the girl has something that real sex doesn’t.”” And what would that be? ““Repeatability, it has safety, it can’t laugh at you, it can’t tease you.”” And then Brooke responded, ““Technology has always isolated us. That’s why we crave better and better and more and more technology — to occupy those lonely hours with flights into the unknown.”” Then this same fellow responded, ““I would argue that what really drives technology and interactive technology is not the recreation of experiences that we can have in real life, but the
invention of experiences that we can’t have in real life, and that’s when we see the real leaps forward.”’’ So somehow in our consciousness, there’s this insidious quality of the mind to desire what we can’t have or what we don’t have, and that’s where the technology is accommodating us now. And then Brooke concluded, “‘Inevitably, then, the fingertip touch the scientists are experiencing now will blossom into a full-blown body suit. In fact, there are companies working on that right now.’” And I don’t fully understand what all that means. “‘That will be the moment when communications technology fulfills its ultimate potential — to connect us entirely antiseptically and without fear of judgment or rejection with the person we most desire.’”

I thought that was interesting that the communications technology — a technology that has this amazing ability to connect us, to bring us together, to help us understand one another — also, when misused, has this amazing ability to disconnect us, to misinform us, to divide us, and maybe even worse yet, create an illusion of connection, to connect us antiseptically, leaving us feeling more empty and isolated than ever before. And that’s so much more possible in cyberspace, where we have this environment where people can actually create an identity. All the body coatings of age and gender and location are stripped away, and you can be anyone you want to be in cyberspace. So someone who’s created a false identity can connect with another person who’s created a false identity, and I’m not sure what kind of a connection that really is.

But it’s also curious to me that we have come to prefer relating to pictures or images or even psychological constructs of people, rather than relating to real people. How is it that we’re afraid to have real relationships with real people? When did numbness and fantasy become preferable to being alive and real? Certainly reality is harder work and riskier business. It demands that we develop the social and emotional skills which enable us to relate to one another. Relationships require a person to be present, to be watchful, mindful, and sensitive to the needs of oneself and one’s partner. Real relationships require work, faith, courage, and commitment — none of which are popular ideas in our media culture of instant gratification and quick fixes.

Eric Fromm, the author of The Art of Loving, suggests that loving is an art and like any other art it requires a great deal of discipline, commitment, concentration, and patience to master. Most importantly, the ability to love depends on one’s capacity to emerge from narcissism. It requires the development of humility and the ability to accept what is instead of distorting it with one’s self interests, needs, and fears.

Pornography consumption cripples us and cripples our ability to love. According to Norman Cousins, “‘The trouble with this wide-open pornography is not that it corrupts, but that it desensitizes; not that it unleashes the passions, but that it cripples the emotions; not that it encourages a mature attitude, but that it is a reversion to infantile obsessions; not that it removes the blinders, but that it distorts the view. Prowess is proclaimed, but love is denied. What we have is not liberation, but dehumanization.’”

For example, take this Gucci ad. Does this look like a loving interaction? Do the people in the ad look very alive? For one thing we can’t even see the woman. We
might be tempted to believe that the only value she possesses is contained between her neck and knees. One of our popular culture’s more damaging messages is that sexiness and sex appeal comes from without — the clothes we wear, how much we weigh, our perfume, et cetera, rather than from within. Real sexiness has to do with passion for life, uniqueness and vitality. Do we see any passion for life here? And there are numerous ads that are designed to sell a product that are very sexual in nature, but the messages in the ads do not really promote a healthy view of relating.

The advent of Playboy started the slow infiltration of pornography into the mainstream media. What was once relegated to back rooms and adult theaters has now become prime-time television entertainment. The media’s soft-core pornography is more insidious than traditional pornography because it is considered so normal and acceptable that it is not even usually thought of as pornography.

According to Robert Jensen, “‘‘Soft core pornography is simply traditional pornography with clothes on.’’” Others say, “‘‘The ‘‘explicitness of sexual content varies considerably’’ between traditional pornography and mainstream soft-core pornography, but ‘‘the commonality lies in that they all utilize sexuality, and usually it’s the sexuality of women, to sell their product.’’”

Over the past thirty years, so we see images of women all the time in our culture, where their bodies are being used to sell a product. Over the past thirty years, America has transformed itself into a pornographic culture. Maggie Gallagher notes, “‘‘A pornographic culture is not one in which pornographic materials are published and distributed. A pornographic culture is one which accepts the ideas about sex on which pornography is based.’’”

Sometimes when I think about it, I think that pornography is a cultural, a really powerful cultural metaphor which illustrates the state of affairs between men and women in our society today. Let’s explore some of the educational or rather mis-educational content of pornography — especially the messages about men and women.

The pornographic images that surround us get encoded into the ways men and women think about themselves as male and female — masculine and feminine. Women understand that they are valued for beauty, passivity and sex appeal. Young women understand very well that the way to exert power is through their physical appearance and their sexuality, not through their brains, voices, gifts or talents. Women learn that their bodies are not valued for their productive or reproductive capacity, their strength or their general state of health, but for decorativeness.

So even female athletes, these two athletes who are very competent, athletic, talented women, when they are portrayed in magazines, they get sexualized. Instead of portraying their athletic skill and abilities, they’re using their bodies. Whereas masculinity is portrayed as strong, rebellious, forceful and often violent. Men are portrayed as being powerful and in control. They are the conquerors, the warriors, the gladiators. So you see these images of men and that often that tough exterior is a mask that men have to wear because they’ve learned early on that they can’t really show sensitive feelings. Boys learn and men learn early on that if you want to make it in the
world of men, that you have to suck it up, you have to keep things inside. The whole idea of control is about controlling your emotions and how you present yourself, but it also bleeds over into how you control over people.

These images and ideas not only affect how men feel about women, but how men feel about the feminine traits within themselves — to devalue, not only women, but also qualities that get labeled as feminine in our culture. Masculinity and femininity get polarized. These images are powerful forces that keep us trapped in these dysfunctional role and ideas about who we are. Our ability to have authentic and freely chosen lives and relationships is compromised.

When pornography was not in the public domain, it was mainly women in the pornography who were viewed as objects. With pornography firmly entrenched in today’s mainstream media, all women are now viewed as objects. The women in pornography are sexually objectified, leading women as a whole also to be sexually objectified. What that means is that for many men and women too, but men in particular, it’s difficult sometimes for them to look at a woman without sexualizing her.

Sexualized images of women are everywhere in our culture, particularly in advertising. Their messages tell us what we want and why we want it. Whether we like it or not, they influence our constructs of reality and give us ideas about concepts of love, success and normalcy. In fact, in many commercials, the woman, rather than the product, is the focus. This is becoming more common in advertising techniques. So sometimes you can’t even tell for sure what the product is. If the power of advertising will drive up customer demand for a product, and we know that it does, then we can assume that the use of women in that advertising, as well as other media, will also convey a message about women and not just about the product advertised.

Pornography with its exaggeration on visual and sexual stimulation has exploited, distorted, and compromised the emotional and sexual health of many contemporary men and women. The message of pornography and the objectification of women’s bodies create a dysfunctional male pattern of relating to women’s bodies. The women are displaced — their heads are chopped off, their feet are chopped off, you just see sexualized body parts. You see images where you want to consume the product as well as the woman. Women are portrayed as sexy. Gary Brooks calls this pattern of relating one of the most malignant forces in contemporary relationships between men and women. He states, “Her airbrushed perfection permeates our visual environment and our consciousness, creating unreal fantasies and expectations, imposing profound distortions on how men relate to women and to women’s bodies and in turn, how women relate to their physical selves with men.”

Men are conditioned by the media to look at and desire physically attractive women. Throughout our culture, in movies, on television, in magazines and in public meeting places, on billboards, and the internet, men are continually assailed with images of naked and semi-naked women. In addition, they hear the messages that physically attractive and very thin. Quoting Brooks again, “This explosion in the glorification
and objectification of women’s bodies, promotes unreal images of women, distorts physical reality, creates an obsession with visual stimulation, and trivializes all other natural features of a healthy psychosexual relationship.””

Women’s bodies have become objects to be looked at, lined up, compared and rated. Objective measures such as size, shape and harmony of body parts become more important than a woman’s human qualities. Women are buying into the culture as well. Women are becoming competitive and ruthless with one another, spending enormous amounts of money on products, cosmetics, surgeries, clothing and accessories. There is much of comparing, competition, jealousy and knit picking amongst women. Women are beginning to objectify and sexualize themselves in order to look the best, to get the most attention, to win the prize — whatever that might be.

In many instances men and women talk of their attraction to one another in dehumanizing terms based on the body part of their obsession. This was illustrated to me recently during a Barbara Walters special. She was interviewing Justin Timberlake and asking him about his relationship with Britney Spears. She asked him to describe what was it about Britney that attracted him to her, and his first response was “her rear end.””

When women are presented as visually perfect, ever wanting sex objects, then real women with real personalities become more complicated and less appealing. Real women with stretch marks, varicose veins, sagging breasts and cellulite marked legs — common phenomena for most female bodies — may be viewed as ugly or repugnant by men who are so used to seeing woman as objects.

Thus, it might be more appealing to frequent a fantasy life dominated by visual images of idealized body types of sweet, docile women, because in reality such women are inaccessible. Sadly, this objectification and depersonalization is starting to go in the other direction. Women are beginning to objectify and sexualize men as well. Some research indicates that men tend to prefer visual erotica and women tend to prefer the written or spoken erotica found in romance novels or chat rooms. In either case the effects of such objectifying and fantasizing makes us emotionally absent or unavailable for real encounters with real people, including our own spouses and children. It’s kind of easier just to maybe relate to a pair of legs than to a whole person.

Simone de Beauvoir predicted that a society which doesn’t appreciate modesty will be one with more violence to women. Modesty is the virtue that enables all of us to protect and cover those things that are sacred and precious. Women’s bodies are not covered very well in our society today, nor are they considered sacred and precious. Pornography creates a culture where women are so objectified that any type of violent or degrading treatment becomes entertainment for the masses; this becomes more likely as the images become more normalized.

The long-term effects of the constant exposure of pornography in our daily lives can only be measured by the treatment and perception of women in our society. For instance, rap artist Eminem recently received a nomination for Album of the Year for songs about the violent rape and murder of women, including his own wife and mother.
Although he didn’t win the coveted award, he went on to win Grammys in three other categories. That is how acceptable, and even celebrated, the subordination and violent treatment of women is in our culture.

When we turn human beings into objects, it is easy to do violence to them. The real problem of pornography lies in the possibility of becoming the type of person to whom violence is no longer disturbing because it just becomes so normal. It’s the state in which any particular ideology strives.

I just want to conclude this part of my talk with a little bit of this vicious cycle of viewing porn and then becoming porn. The constant bombardment of sexually objectified women in the media serves to construct subjects who are blind to the effects of their own ideology. That blindness extends to both men and women. I find it really interesting that lots of women are just sexualizing and objectifying themselves. In this case we have Jennifer Lopez and Kylee Minogue, who are two talented artists but are still sexualizing and objectifying themselves to sell their own product, which is themselves. A woman who dresses immodestly is essentially objectifying and sexualizing herself, but she believes that she is just really expressing who she is and demonstrating her comfort and acceptance of her own body. She believes that she is freely and powerfully asserting her preferences and desires. What she doesn’t realize is that she is simply an inductee into the cult. She has bought into the propaganda of our pornographic culture. In a quest for equality and power, women are beginning to objectify men. Like I found this ad, it’s in a teen magazine. It says, ““Girls rule, boys drool.”” So it’s like a way to exert power is to be sexually enticing to men. Some women become very sexually aggressive with men. However, beneath the surface of their assertive veneer is anger, resentment and a quest for revenge. Sex becomes a weapon or a powerful bargaining chip. Yet, when used in an unloving way, it yields no real power. This was an ad also I found in a teen magazine, which it’s put out by Candies Foundation, and the Candies ads are the most sexualized, they’re like the worst ads of all, but to feel good about doing that, they’re putting out these ads now saying, ““It’s okay to be sexy; that doesn’t mean you have to have sex,”” which I think is a really confusing message to give people. Be sexy, flaunt it, show it, but that doesn’t mean you have to have sex, and this is an ad to help fight teenage pregnancy. So we’re all kind of caught up in this culture that has normalized the sexualization of people and the objectification of people, turning human beings into objects to be consumed for our self-gratification and pleasure. And I think it’s not probably going to improve real soon, and yet we know from the scriptures that Heavenly Father hasn’t given us any situation or temptation that we can’t overcome or find a way to fight against. So I want to conclude my segment, and then Dr. Fischer will continue with this concept of awakening, but if pornography and these images we see on a daily basis deaden us, what is it that opens us, what is it that wakes us up? I remember reading in one of my professional magazines an article by a man who said in 1957 he was just a young boy living in Brooklyn, New York, and he was from a poor Italian family. And they just were really struggling. Their living conditions were bad, and he got really sick and his mom took him to the hospital, and the doctor is examining him. And he was just a young boy; he wasn’t really paying attention, but he knew he going to die.
And they put him in a room in the hospital to just let him die. And he said he was so sick and he was so tired, the diagnosis was malnutrition and some kind of fever, and he was lying in this bed, and there was a window in his hospital room, and he lied there and he looked at the window, and as he looked at the window he could see the sky and he could see clouds, and sometimes he could see birds fly over, and sometimes pigeons would light in the window. And sometimes he could see the color of the sky change when the sun came up and the sun set and the colors would change. And sometimes he said that when birds flew over and the sun would catch the color of their wings, it was just this beautiful, beautiful image of these birds flying past the window. And he says, “I can’t prove it scientifically, but I believe that my intake, my inspiration literally, my breathing in of the elegance of the beauty of the birds and the sky gave me strength and saved my life. This at least is sure: from that time I have been extraordinarily grateful, susceptible to, and conscious of the beauty of the physical world, even in the bleakest of places like Brooklyn.” He went on to say that beauty is becoming a thing that sometimes we don’t notice very much in our world today, that there’s so much ugliness around us and there’s so much ugliness in the media that beauty is a healing factor, being able to see the beauty of the earth around us, to see nature, that beauty is the thing that connects us to one another. The beauty we’re able to see in the outside world helps to connect us to the beauty within ourselves. So one of the things that we can do to help insulate ourselves from our pornographic media culture is to open our eyes to the beauty around us, the beauty of our surroundings, the beauty of the earth, the beauty of flowers and grass and trees, the beauty of the people around us. Another thing I was thinking, I was readying the book Tuesdays with Morrie, and I don’t know if any of you have read that, but the book about this fellow who was dying of Lou Gerreg’s disease, and it’s a disease that just gradually takes away your abilities to do things, and his former student was interviewing him on Tuesdays and talking to him and he wrote a book about it. But Morrie said, “The culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. We’re teaching the wrong things. We are too involved in materialistic things and they don’t satisfy us. The loving relationships we have, the universe around us, we take these things for granted. We have to be strong enough to say that if the culture doesn’t work, that we won’t buy into it and we’ll create our own. I may be dying, but I’m more happy than a lot of people I know, even in my current condition. I’m surrounded by loving, caring souls. How many people can say that?”

And then the fellow who wrote the book said, “Morrie, true to these words, had developed his own culture — long before he got sick. Discussion groups, walks with friends, dancing to his music in the Harvard Square church. He started a project called Greenhouse, where poor people could receive mental health services. He read books to find new ideas for his classes, visited with colleagues, kept up with old students, wrote letters to distant friends. He took more time eating and looking at nature and wasted no time in front of TV sitcoms or movies. He created a cocoon of human activities — conversation, interaction, affection — and it filled his life like an overflowing bowl of soup.” Morrie went on to say, “I can tell you the thing I am learning most with this disease. The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in.” And then he said, “The fact is, there is no foundation, no secure ground,
upon which people may stand today if it isn’t the family. It’s become quite clear to me as I’ve been sick. If you don’t have the support and love and caring and concern that you get from a family, you don’t have much at all. Love is so supremely important.”"

So I hope that as we go through life, that we can open our eyes to beauty and close our eyes to ugliness, that we will be very active in turning away from a culture that does not support Heavenly Father’s plan and our purposes here in mortality, and I pray that we can open our hearts to one another in real ways. The tendency to isolate, the tendency to be secretive, the tendency to go off by ourselves, is not the thing that will replenish and nourish, unless that tendency to isolate is to rest and hold still and turn to the Lord in prayer and mediation and pondering. And I pray that as we go about our lives, that we’ll be more active than maybe we’ve been in the past, more active in turning away from this culture and more active in fighting this culture, that there are organizations in this area that are actively doing things from a legal perspective and an activist perspective to say no and to stop the infiltration of pornography into our society, but just as illustrated in the Sex and Technology, now it’s going to cell phones, it’s going to be harder and harder to control. It’s something we have to control from within, and I pray that as we connect to our Heavenly Father, we will be able to do that, and I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.