The hallmark concept of the work that will be presented today by myself, and Drs. Dougher and Moody, is that it is good for a person to develop capacities to respond in accord with one’s values to the temptation of pornography. We believe, like the deceased singer Marvin Gaye, that there ain’t no mountain of busy-work high enough and ain’t no river of computer filtering systems wide enough and ain’t no exercise routine long enough to keep the temptation of pornography and its related kin (masturbation, acting out, etc.) away from you. It’s not a matter of IF it comes knocking at your door any more, but WHEN. Our goal is to prepare folks for its door approach. To be able to respond self-respectingly to the temptation of pornography is what is meant to be responsible, or, response-able. Most people feel very good when they are able to respond favorably to a difficult challenge in life, and feel rather defeated when they are not. We prefer and want to encourage the feeling good part.

My goal today is to describe how key mistakes and failures in the development of intimate, close relationships can influence the progression of a problem with pornography and/or masturbation. I will also describe how the development of intimacy, based on a platform of self-respect, can lead the way out of such habits.

I also want to discuss how addressing the temptation of pornography forthrightly and in addressing our problems forthrightly with other people are projects through which one can achieve levels of intimacy that are rewarding and most satisfying. Frankly, I don’t think people find lasting solutions to pornography use without a sense of building an increase of intimacy in their lives.

First, let me, via theorists and researchers, define intimacy, which has several facets. Heller and Wood (1998) and Sternberg (1987) described it as a relationship quality that promotes closeness, bondedness, and connection. The quality of something we find important effects our feelings and our well-being.

Weingarten (1992) described intimacy as occurring when people share meaning, are trying to understand together the meaning of their experiences, and coordinate their actions based on these meanings. This suggests that some degree of openness and communication about what one understands and experiences, as well as coming to agreement about meaning and the importance of it, creates an atmosphere of closeness between people. Being able to follow through with the actions related to those agreements creates trust in a relationship, a vital quality for intimacy to occur. A high quality intimate relationship should provide the opportunity to be understood, to be validated, and to be supported. There is something quite rewarding in knowing your partner thinks and acts and especially feels the same way you do about something.

Other words and terms commonly associated with the word “intimacy” include:

--acceptance

--naturalness, or, what I call the ability to be your own nerdy little self in relation to the someone you care about
--honest self-disclosure
--autonomy and fusion
--similarity in values and goals
--responsive, communicated empathy
--warm regard
--expressions of endearment and affection
--and under certain conditions, flirting and in other conditions, consenting sexuality

A critical function of these qualities is to provide each person a sense of security about the continuity and endurance of the relationship. The expectation is for a commitment to mutual well-being and closeness over time. Notice that the relationship itself is actually neutral—I am not necessarily describing a marriage. Intimacy can certainly occur between a parent and child, or among siblings. It can develop rewardingly between coworkers and friends. It is the quality of the team work of the people involved that creates intimacy in relationships. The main thing you notice is that over time you begin to depend on the relationship for some of your well-being. Of course, some relationships have more intimacy qualities than others; we tend to have only a few that are highly intimate, and marriage is expected to be especially exclusive.

A researcher named Schnarch (1991) asserted that intimacy is the process one has in relationships as one becomes more self-aware and feels solid in identity. The emphasis is on the capacity of the individual to give in the relationship. Men seem to have particular intimacy needs around the ability to give. Men tend to feel best when they develop ways to contribute to the functional needs of relationships—providing survival and comfort things that only money and hard work can buy and the maintenance of those things. Men are socialized to feel most worthy when they have developed, mostly from their relationships with other men, the skills needed to earn and contribute to the welfare of others. These socializations are actually part of our doctrines, as expressed in scriptures such as D&C 107:100 “‘He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand,’” and 1 Timothy 5:8 “‘But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.’” In God’s eyes, evidently, to be unwilling to provide and work is worse than being unfaithful. That may help us place a habit like pornography into a better perspective.

As they develop the capacity to provide, men also tend to want to feel the extent of their God-given powers—powers to experiment and derive meaning, powers to act and intervene, powers to belong to a brotherhood and a society, powers to create, recreate, and procreate. The development of one’s physical, mental, and emotional capacity to be sexual, and use sexual energy for good, is one of men’s greatest challenges. The power of the sexual urge, in my observation, tends to be underestimated by some women, as well as by other men who preach that you should just be able to stop and control. Through capacities to provide and relate, men gain the respect of others, and build self-respect. My assertion today is that self-respect is the foundation for men participate in intimate relationships, and that self-respect is often earned through developing the capacity to handle one’s sexuality.
Among the men that I work with, they tend to feel quite defeated in their attempts to control their sexual urges and impulses. They have often lost a good deal of self-respect and feel that if others knew about their struggles, they would lose their respect as well.

A key mistake that often propels this habit occurs early, when sexual interest and arousal were forming, and the man became somehow ashamed of this fact. It was so personal and intensive that he felt out of sorts——it was unlike any other power he had previously developed. This is a crucial time in the development of a young man because of the meaning he makes out of his experience. If he feels unsafe to be able to share his thoughts and feelings with people older and more experienced than himself, he will use the natural boy underground to deal with it. The boy underground is filled with topics and activities that boys know mothers and to some extent fathers do not approve of. Boys are somewhat experimental and are trying to learn for themselves what they think, feel and eventually approve of or not. I know my boys are in the underground when I hear them downstairs laughing uncontrollably about something. They tend to only laugh that hard when it’s an underground topic.

Sexuality is one of the main topics of the underground, either through directly dealing with it, or indirectly. Sometimes the above ground, adult environment is a safe place to deal with sexuality——you can get good answers to questions, you can anticipate what is coming up for your body, you can gage your own feelings of attraction and arousal, and, just as importantly, you can joke about it with the adults in your life so that you can relieve some tension around it and not take it too seriously. However, even if the environment is safe, the boy still may take his sexuality so personally and so seriously that he does not take the risk to be willing to talk about it, driving it further underground. There is no guarantee that just because an environment is safe it will be used accordingly by the person it is meant to help. However, if the environment is not safe to discuss such “forbidden” topics, there is almost a guarantee that the powers will become misunderstood, the boy will pathologize his own feelings and actions, and his personality will split. When this happens, it is almost assured that he will become quite sexually charged. Do you see this? When an environment is reasonably safe AND the young man takes a chance on the environment and admits his thoughts and feelings (even though this is awkward and boys do this in their own ways), real intimacy and trust can be built. If the boy does not trust the environment to help him handle his feelings and drives——whether the environment is trustworthy or not——he will turn underground and rely on himself to make the necessary adjustments and interpretations, and he will fail in doing so. The power is too strong to handle alone. The more he tries to handle it alone and develops a defense around this issue, the less he will be able to develop intimacy in relationships, because to build intimacy requires the admission of faults and difficulties so others can prove their support to you.

**Intimacy requires the admission of inadequacy on the part of individuals.** There is no way each individual is equipped to handle all the demands of life and relationships, without the direct help of many others. In loving relationships, we want to be competent, helpful, trustworthy and strong. Yet, we have weaknesses, and sooner or later we can learn that trusting others with the admission of our worst failings, shortcomings, and sins can be the key to helping ourselves cope with them and eventually work them out of us. When we perceive that intimacy is only achieved through looking good, being good, or doing only the right things, this becomes a set up for hiding our problems, because not one of us can maintain doing absolutely good for very long.
I’ve enjoyed thinking about a quote from author and marriage and family therapist, Frank Pittman, who, in his 1993 book entitled “Man Enough,” wrote: “[Some] men have spent their lives carefully shielding their defects from the other guys, believing that other males would tear them apart emotionally if a vulnerable opening were revealed. They could not take the crucial step necessary for men to feel safe in the world of men: they didn’t reveal their greatest shortcoming to the other guys.” There is power in this insight—in order to achieve the quality of support that will assist our healing, admission and understanding is essential. This quote refers to the importance of revealing ourselves to others of our same gender, who are likely to understand our problems with greater depth because of the similarity in what is often experienced within the context of gender.

The hallmark of what constitutes an intimate relationship is the meeting of two elements: personal vulnerability with compassion. Revealing our “greatest shortcoming,” as Pittman said, or weakness, or sin, or whatever you want to call it, sets up what I call the compassion paradox. The compassion paradox is this—to disclose what we think is our worst defect or our worst fear, expecting that we will be met with humiliation and abandonment, and instead receiving understanding and relational acceptance. Men who have battled privately for years with a pornography habit are caught in this compassion paradox. They can’t quite believe that revealing their weakness will do more good than harm. They believe that others will be too hurt; that their own reputations will be shot; that they will be viewed as purely a disappointment in the eyes of those who trusted them. And worse——“what if the problem persists after I disclose my weakness, as I fear it might and probably will? There is no way I would deserve compassion for that!”

Another quote, this one from author Christopher Lasch (1984). “The distinguishing characteristic of selfhood……is not rationality, but the critical awareness of man’s divided nature.” To be intimate with ourselves requires honesty, tolerance, and patience with our own dividedness. To be intimate with others requires us to accept the same in them. There are LDS scriptures which we love to quote, which say that there is opposition in all things (2 Nephi 2:11). Opposition such as misery and joy, righteousness and sin, captivity and liberation, justice and mercy, law and being, good and evil. What we don’t often say or like to admit is that one of those things that contains a lot of opposition in it, is ourselves. The evidence is so clear—we consistently act on our impulses and choices, doing some good and some evil as we go. Battles go on inside of ourselves from time to time as we experience competing desires.

There is another scripture, much less often quoted, that I think helps place our divided nature in context. It is D&C 101:38 and it states “‘And seek the face of the Lord always, that in patience ye may possess your souls, that ye may have eternal life.’” To be divided or dualistic is to be human, it is to live with two and more sides of ourselves. It is to feel the pull and strain and conflict of opposing enticements. To be patient with that fact, and to work through our evil propensities in patience, requires the help of others and of the Lord, as the scripture suggests. The more insular the individual, the more he or she lives inside, defensively not letting on about weakness and sin, the more out of possession of his or her soul he or she becomes, because the inside battle will reach untenable conclusions. It is interesting to me that it is actually difficult to hide our weaknesses for a long time—we seem to only have the choice of voluntarily or involuntarily revealing our sins. It seems to me that the Lord has every intention of getting us to
When we try to hide our problems, or work on them alone, we notice that the task becomes too great. If we are bent on finding our own solutions, we run into the trap of believing how things “ought” to be or “must” be in order to fill our deepest needs. Dr. Robert Firestone (1999) calls these “‘fantasy solutions’” in which we create solutions through the powers of our imagination, by concocting in our minds ways in which our problems should come to a resolve and our needs fulfilled. Dr. Firestone’s theory goes that the more we come to have a difficult, troublesome, or impossible time reaching our goal of problem resolution/need fulfillment, the more we are likely to invent un-realistic, imagined ways to actually resolve them. We can impose upon our situation a false sense of self-reliance. According to Firestone, this stance creates “‘……an inward, protective style of living that leads the individual to seek satisfaction more in fantasy than in the real world…….It is the avoidance of genuine friendship, free choice, and love in favor of familiarity and false safety’” (Firestone, 1985, p. 26). I think pornography and masturbation are extensions of this kind of fantasy thinking. They create an escape outlet for having to deal with difficult feelings and situations, and in having to face others courageously to negotiate the meeting of our needs and theirs. Remember that the development of intimacy is based on the process of coordinating efforts to solve problems and negotiate the fulfillment of needs and wants (D&C 82:17).

Allow me to give you a scenario I have heard many times. A young man described his family of origin as being highly structured in order to provide the success of all its members——academically, religiously, socially. His father was a successful and intelligent business man; his mother was a successful homemaker who spent time with her many children. He felt close to his mother, and respected his father. The family was clearly expected to be a unit, almost at the expense of the individual. His older sister had shown some signs of independence and had gone counter to the parents in some ways. As the oldest boy in the family, he felt a particular sense of obligation to be different from her, perform to standard, and set a good example for his brothers and sisters. Expectations to excel were high——in school, in church, in developing talents, in marriage, in life. I do not mean to demean this family——they were successful in many ways and provided a generally secure, loving environment. However, an Achilles heal of this family was that sex was not discussed openly. He never remembered his father discussing the subject; his mother gave him one or two obligatory sex-talks. No spontaneous sex chats, no sex jokes, all essential body parts completely covered at all times, no sexy behavior between mom and dad——a veritable sex desert! By age 13 he found out on his own that his body could do new and amazing things! By age 14 he had an ongoing masturbation problem. By age 15 he knew it was wrong and felt terribly guilty and out of control. You see his dilemma, don’t you? You had to be successful and not let parents down, and a way to accomplish this was to show no signs of real problems. Now this was the interpretation by the young man——he came to the belief that you cannot share troubling personal concerns because it would be too embarrassing and emotionally upsetting to parents. Talking about it would simply make matters worse. Since sex is the most personal area that can be discussed, how families communicate about it sends strong messages to children about problems in general——can we deal with tough topics and feel at some ease, or not? Eventually masturbation became part of the fantasy solution to the tension and pressure created by a rather perfectionistic and a sexually repressive environment. Wendy Ulrich describes this as a dynamic
of high expectation without the structure in place to achieve the desired goal. I would add the underlying loyalty demand—the boy experiences enough support in other ways from his parents to not even imagine that they could be partially to blame for his circumstances. He places all blame on himself for his mistakes. Answering his questions, offering good information, reassuring him about his body, encouraging some self-control, and offering support for problems—the boy could not even envision getting this from his parents—it was just not the way they operated about this issue. As a result, he never experienced compassion in the light of sharing his deepest problem, so that in turn, he could show himself compassion during times of trouble. So, masturbation becomes its own tension reliever, its own valve to let off steam and pressure since the interpersonal solution was not feasible.

Fantasy solutions are not usually carefully plotted; most people do not even recognize the extent to which they use them. Certainly this boy had no concept that what he was doing was his own solution to his family’’s problem solving disability. He had no idea he was building communication defenses that would carry into adulthood. He did not think that the opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with his father was being squandered. You see the connection between this problem and stunted intimacy development? The very thing that would have helped this boy with his problem—timely, open communication about a difficult, emotional problem, or, true intimacy, was the very thing he missed out on. Missing out on the development of intimacy—always in the context of real, hard problems—is the exact thing that perpetuated the problem. This is how a lack of intimacy in the first place can help create a problem with pornography and related concerns.

Perhaps the most lasting fantasy solution, still with the young man at the time I met him, was that he alone could and had to be able to stop his problem. He without any direct assistance from others would need to find a way to stop it. His fantasy was “I have the strength to stop this; it would not be helpful to talk to others, other than my Bishop about this.” And why wouldn’t he arrive at this fantasy? It is consistent with the message given by his parents—“We don’t talk about such matters, we leave it up to you and perhaps a church authority to help you figure it out. We are here for you but not for that.” This is the equivalent of suddenly giving him the keys to the car and without a lesson saying “Good Luck—we know you can handle it!” The young man’s innocent, yet naive assumption, even in adulthood, was that to talk openly about it would mean condoning it and perpetuating it. “Wouldn’t the problem get worse if you talk about it?” That was his question. I am not downplaying the role of Bishop or ecclesiastic leader in this process. I mean to say that by the time a Bishop got involved, the damage to the possibility of an intimate solution was already done. The intimacy formed between this young man and his Bishop in the form of confession and encouragement, at least in the long run, proved insufficient for his needs. The boy was still working under the fantasy ideal that the care of others would not matter—it would only be his own hard determination that would matter. I see this all the time. The lack of timely and direct openness, empathy, care and consistent guidance from parent to child concerning this matter, eventually leads the child to feel despair, shame, the need for further isolation, and re-determination to just control himself, all which create the perfect emotional environment for a masturbation habit.

These are a few examples of the workings of fantasy solutions. I want to say that partaking in the inherent risks associated with the development of intimate relationships leads a person out of rigid, demanding, fantasy solutions. There are constantly new opportunities to engage in
In the remainder of my address, I want to discuss how couples can build and utilize intimacy to help the man in the relationship overcome a compulsion to use pornography. Some of the principles I discuss could also happen between parent and child, Bishop and struggling member, and in other close relationships. I offer a scenario of successive phases couples may go through to reach a point where a pornography habit can be abandoned in favor of intimacy.

I call the initial phase, the **Time of Disclosure, Response, and Commitment**. The more the man has been withdrawn in his habits and defensive with himself and with others, the more he has used fantasy to resolve his internal emotional turmoils. The more he has turned to fantasy and hidden means of gratification, the more distance he will have naturally created in his relationships. This may not always be outwardly obvious. He may be quite social and outgoing and successful in some areas, but there is something important about himself that he has kept hidden, something that has occupied much of his thinking and emotions. He is not the same on the inside as he appears to be on the outside. To disclose to a caring person about his problem is the first step toward achieving an intimate solution.

Often a man who is far into a secretive life gets caught, or put in ultimatums in which he has a clear choice: either come out of the shell and begin to tell what is happening, or withdraw further and experience the social consequences of having others withdraw from you. The fear of the man in disclosing himself is that the punishment, including humiliation, will be greater than he can emotionally manage. This humiliation, on top of everything he has done and everything he will be asked to give up, he concludes, may not be worth the risk. “‘If only there is a way for me to put an end to my habits using self-control,’” he tells himself, “‘then no one will ever have to know of my terrible weakness.”’ Since this solution has obviously not worked in the past, he is tempted to double his efforts——be twice as self-determined. Since this is an isolative solution, it will fail, and further failure will have the effect of enlarging his self-hatred and narcissism. This is why he fears intimacy——he has not experienced the fruits of having someone know about him, and having compassion for him. He has not yet experienced enough of the compassion paradox to perhaps even know of it, let alone believe in it. Remember, the compassion paradox is to disclose the weakness and shame, expecting the worst——abandonment and humiliation, and instead, receiving care and concern, which in turn allows us to practice compassion on ourselves.

There are several reasons why compassion is so difficult for them to believe, and why so many get caught rather than take the initiative to disclose. First and foremost, the fantasy solution does not take intimacy seriously as a real, viable solution. The fantasy solution is self-only-reliant. It requires the man to be manly enough, to be spiritual enough on his own to take care of his own problems. To disclose his problem would be to betray the fantasy beliefs. Second, if he did take a chance on compassion, this would require the man to practice compassion on himself. Inherent in the repetition of the habit is a self-punishing, a self-putdown feature, as if to say “‘I don’t deserve compassion.’” He can hardly image real, non-critical compassion. Men simply do not turn to pornography when they are actually feeling compassion, caring, understanding, and love from others and from themselves. The deeper paradox of compassion, almost always unconscious, is this: “‘I would have to give up my fantasy solution, which includes the rewards...
of pornography, if I actually had an ongoing sense of care and compassion——from others, from God, from myself. I don’t know if I believe that, I’ve never really experienced the full effects of that, I can’t believe it would be as intensely rewarding as pornography can be, I’m not sure I deserve it, I don’t really even understand it.”” That is the internal struggle when fantasy meets reality.

Sometimes people say to these men, in order to motivate compassion “‘you are participating in the exploitation of women by participating in pornography-the women who submit to the camera, your mother, your wife, etc. Have more compassion for their feelings.’” Now I admit that this is a true statement. But a man in this condition can hardly use this information to his advantage. The reason is, he still has not allowed himself to be granted enough compassion in his problem to feel compassion in return. The way to help men empathize with the fact that they are exploiting others, is to help them see that they are being exploited also. I tell men this, that they are being exploited, and they routinely say things like “‘I am the one receiving the guilty pleasure, no one is making me do this, I am at fault, it is my choice.’” This is a naïve and non-systemic view. They have no idea how vulnerable to the industry they have become. I say “‘You are being used, you are being toyed with every day. There is a vast industry that preys on you at many levels, and the devil is behind it. The best parts of yourself——your ability to think and feel intensively, your capacity to be attracted and to have your body respond to that attraction, the gift of being able to emotionally and physically express your deepest love——all these things that help you be a vital man, all these things are being enticed and used against you by a power that has none of these things. That power is jealous of you, so it turns the things you prize most against you.’” I say “‘you’ve seen the movie Spiderman, right?’” Nearly every American man has seen Spiderman. When the young man in the movie gets these special powers, as he is trying to figure out how to use them for good, along comes the evil power which tries to entice him to use those powers for evil. The evil green man appeals to Spiderman’s vanity, his desire for some control and power in his life, his own desire to be of help……everything. I say, “‘You, my friend, are Spiderman, and your sexuality is your powerful gift.’” Now here is one key as to why this message helps——eventually they see that they are being used, like a puppet on strings. They come to realize that being used and exploited and losing agency are the most unmanly of all feelings. This is exactly what these hate the most about the entire condition. This gets them angry. Exploitation is the opposite of intimacy.

One thing about disclosure, of course, is that the one hearing the disclosure is a real person, with her own thoughts about all this, her own fears in the world, her own fantasy solutions. The most difficult fantasy to work through for some women is “‘My man, in order for me to be happy and feel whole, MUST not have any kind of REAL problem or sin. He can be mischievous, and kind of dumb, as most men will be, but no SERIOUS weaknesses. After all, I don’t have any REAL sins, I’m doing MY part.’” What a let down this can become to some women. One woman I spoke to received the self-disclosure from her boyfriend, whom she is considering marrying, that he had engaged in sex before, and had trouble with masturbation and pornography in adolescence and sometimes in young adulthood. She said “‘It wasn’t on my list of qualities I wanted in a man that I wrote in my MIA Maid class.’” This was a difficult accommodation for her, because neither her experiences nor fantasies included real possibilities. She said she noticed that each time they discussed this issue, and he was able to hear her questions, concerns, disappointments, and anger——she felt strangely close to him. I don’t know which might have
surprised her more——the fact that these things had happened in his life, or that she could actually draw close to such a man.

This first phase——time of disclosure and response, elicits many emotions from both partners. It is normal that this problem challenges the very commitment to the relationship, because it rattles the foundation of intimate trust. People become afraid of their emotions and possible reactions, and may withdraw into a compromise, in which neither will bring up the painful subject.

"""We’’ll just leave it alone and hope for the best because remember our fantasy——if we talk about it and our feelings, it will only stir up trouble and make it happen more!'”

I urge couples to communicate about their commitment to each other. If the man is determined to overcome this problem and grow from the experience of it, and is willing to go outside of himself for help and support, good things can happen. I urge the husband to not make promises he cannot keep, as he has done to himself countless times in the past; I urge the wife to not make it her problem, or to join him in simply trying to control situations to make the problem go away.

The following scenario will be insufficient: Stop the Bad Thing

Elder Maxwell commented on this way of thinking: ““......educating and training our desires clearly requires understanding the truths of the gospel, yet even more is involved. President B Y confirmed, saying ‘‘It is evident that many who understand the truth do not govern themselves by it; consequently, no matter how true and beautiful truth is, you have to take the passions of the people and mould them to the law of God.’’ ‘‘Do you’’ Brigham Young also said, ‘‘think that people will obey truth because it is true, unless they love it?’’ I like how Elder Maxwell and President Young freely consented that desires and passions are normal and important, and that it requires time and love to mould them into gospel law, so that we may fully enjoy them.

If both partners can tolerate staying together, and take the chance to communicate regularly about the problem, the intimate solution begins to take some shape.

The second phase I might call Breaking Through Old Fantasy Solutions. This is a time of learning for both partners——learning about themselves, learning about the problem, learning about each other. Here is the awful truth they must deal with——the more habitual and chronic it was, the more likely indulgences will recur. I’m not saying it is always true, but the spouse must get used to the possible reality that the use of pornography is likely to recur. She needs to consider ways to handle it. Pornography occupied and still occupies a space in the emotional cycling of the man who used it. There will surely be feelings of withdrawal, and times in which he may be overcome by these feelings. In our groups and in individual therapy, we do not set dates by which he should stop doing this. We believe that it requires a patient approach, and that regressing is typical. The best way to make it happen again is to demand that it stop now.

If the problem is not going to be immediately overcome, it is important for the couple to decide what deserves merit. If being completely free of the pornography habit is the only merit-able state, then there will be a consistent feeling of failure and defeat and starting over. Instead, ask ““What in our relationship is meritorious? Ongoing disclosure from the husband? Checking in with her from time to time, even willing to disclose a set-back? Her sharing her feelings and thoughts with him? Him standing up for himself on some issue? Or her?’’ There are many ways for the couple to make gains, even though the problem may not be resolved. I think it is meritorious for them to offer encouragement, express their belief in the strengths of the other,
and to not let the problem dominate the emotionality of their relationship or their commitment one to another. This helps relieve a guilt-ridden stance to the problem. Here is a quote from authors Kramer and Joyce: "A person’s guilt feelings are a statement of hopelessness over never being able to do enough to earn merit. A life devoted to compiling guilt feelings……obscures……responsible response." People often use guilt feelings to defend against proper acceptance and the ability to account for their experience, and therefore, their experience cannot help them. They are not free to together make meaning that might otherwise inform their future. This is why it is so crucial to discuss the problem forthrightly, so that a larger meaning can be made.

Learning about himself and his problem happens as he stops running quickly away from a relapse by trying to forget it or by shaming himself, and instead looks back and tries to understand how this might have happened. Under the right circumstances, feedback from a therapist, feedback from male peers, feedback from a spouse, feedback from a parent, feedback from a caring ecclesiastical leader about this can be extremely helpful. Each incident of indulgence will contain important clues for him and possibly the couple if he and she are willing to look for them. This is one spot in which I think God is quite helpful. I think that through humility and communication, Jesus is quite willing to forgive each incident. He is also quite willing to help the person see what may have happened to set up the incident in the first place. After all, Jesus saw the whole thing. His capacity to tolerate the truth and to help us address the honest truth of ourselves is one of his awe inspiring characteristics.

The woman also will likely need outlets to talk about the problem with a few trusted people. People who will strictly keep the confidence of the couple, who will not share what is happening, yet someone with whom she can be very direct. This can be quite embarrassing especially for the man, but it will be good for him to endure this, because, again the paradox, it will actually help lift pressure that than add.

In this phase, I encourage couples to communicate about what they are learning, what they are coming to understand about all this, even if sometimes it seems like they are only learning how difficult it can be and how much they hate this thing. But you must believe that there is purpose in being subject to sin, and that as a symptom it is instructive. You have to be willing to look for it, though.

Requesting and offering help to each other during this time can be good and provide encouragement. A man told me that one night, later in the evening after his wife had gone to bed, he was still needing to work late on the computer in his home. He invited his wife, who had been sleeping, if she would lay on the couch and sleep while he did his work. He knew temptation would be there, and he wanted her help. She consented and to him it seemed she was glad to do so. Later, when she was feeling discouraged, she blurted out that she actually hated doing that and it was very inconvenient. Later she told him that she just hated the whole thing, ""Why did THIS problem have to be in our marriage?"" He was understanding of her. Do you see how it made them equals? He wished it were out of his life as much as she did, and they both had to inconvenience themselves in order to be responsive to temptation. That equality, whether they know it or not, builds intimacy.

A problem to avoid is having the wife become the monitor of the husband’s behavior. While her
involvement can provide essential support and accountability, ultimately he must come to terms with the temptations that beset him and become responsive to the values to which he aspires. She can offer assistance, but cannot be his conscious. The man would do well to find a few other people in his life to report his progress and setbacks. His willingness to be accountable is a sign to the woman that he is doing something about the problem, and going outside of himself to gain knowledge and support. Confession and accountability are necessary, but alone are often insufficient——they are only partial steps in building intimacy.

How often should couples directly discuss the problem, or what should be the content of what they talk about? There may not be a single correct answer to this question, but one thing is certain—it is better to be communicative and work through painful thoughts and feelings rather than avoid them. Some couples get rather stuck in this phase, not knowing how or when to communicate. Some husbands and wives have found it helpful to have weekly check-in times, in which they will be sharing with each other their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Other couples share more spontaneously, as issues and questions come up. Each partner should have the freedom to talk openly when he or she senses a concern, or has something to share. It is important to share what you are learning about the problem and yourself and the process you are going through on a consistent basis. Talk about successes and feelings of grace.

A third phase I would call **Experiencing the Difference Between False and True Intimacy.** If the man is still at work in trying to be more calm about his dualistic self, and the woman is working to accept the terms of the reality of her thoughts, feelings, and relationship, they will get to a point in which they have enough data to make comparisons. Life with pornography; life without pornography; life more openly with pornography, life more openly without pornography. Life with conflict and guilt; life with deeper, less defensive feelings; life when it seems we are back to the drawing board; life when it seems we have made nice progress. The truth is, they are not back to the drawing board if they have made it this far. Even if a man resigns for a while and goes back to viewing pornography, he is not the same as he was before. He now has the additional light and rewards of increased intimacy in his life, and pornography will not exactly feel the same. This is the critical point of reference, and a time in which he can recognize, if he is willing to see it, that pornography just plain hurts. Not just theoretically or in a guilt/shame sort of way, but because it gives him an ache inside. It does exploit—it does take away, it really doesn’t feed in a nutritional way. In not running away from problems and relapses, as in former times, a man develops a greater capacity to look at himself—what he does, how he feels, what he thinks.

He may be more moody at times as he faces the disappointments and resentments of his life. Being open about his disappointments and resentments, without resorting to former ways of secretly making himself feel better, is perhaps the largest hurdle he will make. These disappointments or resentments may include elements of his relationship with his wife, as well as others——family, friends, work, God. It may feel unfair of him to express these, after the bitter disappointments and resentments she has felt. But if he is to enter a new kind of life in which he addresses his concerns in the open, he must express these and together they need to find real solutions. As he comes to see more clearly the function of his habits and addictions, he will be able to meet his needs in more intimate and successful ways. While this can be emotionally painful and taxing, it is the part of the work that brings the greatest satisfaction.
This phase may last a while, longer than you would like it to. Someone said “I wish this pain was a lame donkey that I could just shoot!” Yet, this is a critical stage that helps prevent relapse in the long run. It is a time of deeper soul searching and of deeper feeling. You recall the scripture that says because of iniquity, the love of men wax cold. His emotions are warming up, and he experiences stronger sorrow, stronger anger, stronger sadness, stronger joy, stronger relief, stronger satisfaction. All these allow the roots of hope to grow deeper, and feelings of closeness and intimacy can grow as well. It is a time to build patience and accept graces, large and small. One must get re-acquainted and in some cases newly acquainted with the impact of truth and love. It’s an acquired capacity—to feel and accept self-respect, and the love of others and the love of Jesus. Over time, love has the ability to burn fear and hatred out of the chest or head of a man, and pornography habits cannot endure this.

The last phase I have seen I call A Time of Healing and New Growth. Men are so incredibly unaware that healing is a necessary part of all this, that you have to actually point it out when it happens. A man can cry tears of sorrow or thanksgiving and joy and he doesn’t even know exactly why. He just thinks there is something wrong with him for crying and being a boob! What he doesn’t know, nor she, is that as they have challenged the old fantasy solutions—their unrealistic beliefs about how life should be and how problems ought to be resolved—and as they challenged these beliefs with sometimes frightening reality and setbacks, they were uprooting themselves and being replanted. They were in new terrain, new soil. It always takes a while for a trans-plant to get settled in and start to grow again, because the plant is trying to heal itself, heal its damaged roots and adjust to the shock of the new environment. It takes time to trust the intimate solutions—that being vulnerable and finding more satisfying ways to meet emotional needs is possible and preferable. But it can’t be a demanding trust, because there needs to be capacity to be let down and to tolerate frustration.

In conclusion, earlier I said this is a patient approach. Even earlier I said that intimacy will not be denied. Patience will not be denied. The day comes in which the replanted plant is progressing quite nicely, as though it had always been in that spot, and a temptation will come along. The man will kind of scratch his head and remember that he used to do that. The woman will notice herself feeling proud of him, partly because she sort of wants to believe she grew a good plant, but mostly because faith has made them both them both more whole with each other.