

Now What?

For **Men** who have been caught looking at pornography
or acting out sexually in ways that compromise their integrity
or feel the need to disclose their lack of sexual integrity

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This is a very personal document. It contains self-disclosures that are not easy for me to make. Yet, as I have let go of my pride and learned that God redeems pain, I am happy to share aspects of my painful journey with you.

Single Men

(If you are a single man, the people you are close to will experience many of the same emotions that a wife feels after learning of her husband's betrayal. If you are in an exclusive dating relationship or engaged much of this information will directly apply to you.)

First of all, you should know that you are not the first man to be caught looking at porn or doing things of a sexual nature that compromise his marital vows or his commitment to Christ. Many men have gone before you on this journey and their restoration depended, to a great extent, on what they did in the early hours and days of that journey.

My hope is that I can draw from my own journey of brokenness and restoration to shine a light on the path through the pain. I am also hoping that my experience as a therapist will help me help you “do the right thing today.” Again, what you do in the next few days and weeks will have great bearing on the potential for restoration.

As someone who has gone before you, let me assure you that there is hope for complete restoration. I walked a very difficult road. Like King David, a prophet pointed his finger in my face and said, “You are that man.” There was plenty of pain to go around. Pain for me! Pain for my friends! The pain my wife and family felt was excruciating, and seeing their pain only added to my own.

But this one thing I know: God is a God of redemption and restoration. Yes, you are in for a painful journey, but don’t run from your pain, embrace it. I’m convinced God loves to redeem pain. Redeeming your pain won’t be God’s first run at this. How painful was the cross?

The hope is not that you will get your old life back. The hope is for a new life entirely. In fact, if you will let the pain do its work, you likely will come into a life that is better in every way. Yes, the road you now take is a road filled with pain. But, if you let it, pain will become a great ally!

Integrity is its own reward!

The price we pay for the loss of our integrity often escapes us. Living without integrity lowers our potential for satisfaction in many areas of life, yet we are unaware of what we have lost. *Only those who possess integrity truly understand its rewards.* Until we choose to live each day “out in the open” we must make do with the paltry, sub-standard pleasures that “living in the shadows” might occasionally provide.

So, if you are ready to unlock all the hidden closets and secret compartments of your life there is hope for a better, new you. There is hope for a better marriage than you have ever had. There is hope that all of your relationship will be more meaningful. There is hope that you will be the man you want to be. If you cut a man of integrity he remains consistent to the core. He is the same man on the outside as he is on the inside.

Did you get caught or did you confess?

If you are acting out now and trying to decide whether or not to confess, I strongly suggest you work with a pastor or counselor to come clean to your wife. Many people will appreciate the fact that you came forward and be more inclined to support you through the process of healing. However, the potential for healing and restoration is greatly affected by how, when, and what you disclose. If you are planning to disclose your brokenness, I strongly suggest that you do so in consultation with a counselor or pastor.

While I strongly urge you to come clean, whether you confess or get caught will have less impact on the restoration of your marriage than you may think. In your wife’s mind, you have betrayed her. The fact that you manned up and confessed may ultimately get you some points with her, but when your wife first hears of your failure, she isn’t giving you any points for anything. She will first and foremost be hurt! Did you hear me? ***She is in real pain.*** What is important as you start this journey is that you embrace her pain as well as your own.

Don’t encourage her not to cry - Cry with her.

Before we consider what you should do in the early hours/days of being caught, let’s consider what your wife is feeling right now.

Your wife feels...

Angry

Anger is an appropriate response to your betrayal. As a therapist, I would be very concerned if your wife was not angry right now. Please do not try to preach your wife’s anger away. Even Jesus got angry, really angry. Also, your

hypocrisy would be speaking so loudly, she wouldn't be able to hear your words.

Let your wife be as angry as she needs to be. Women express their anger in different ways. Some yell and scream while others brood or simply shut down. However it manifests, you cannot and should not challenge her anger. Take it! Then take it some more! Then, take it some more! Do not rise to her anger in any way. Remain penitent!

Repulsion and Disgust

For most women, giving her body to a man is a really big deal. She has to feel safe and secure in order to do that. Your actions have now destroyed her sense of security with you. She now has images of unimaginable debauchery in her head. The man she gave herself to is finding sexual gratification in ways that she sees as filthy and vile. She is disgusted with your behavior and for a while, she will be disgusted at the thought of you touching her.

So... please do not expect her to respond to any kind of physical contact. You are not safe to her right now. In a way, you have become a stranger. She thought she knew you, but now she wonders who you are.

It is my experience that men in this situation are hurt and want to feel like there is hope. Being intimate is reassuring. But hear me when I say, *let her make the first move*. It is likely that eventually she will feel safe again with you, but BE PATIENT and certainly do not attempt to coerce, badger or manipulate her into physical contact. Doing that could undermine any progress you have made.

Betrayed

All healthy women who find out their husbands have had an affair feel a deep sense of betrayal. It is unlikely you would challenge this emotion in her if you had been with another woman. But what about using porn and getting caught?

For women, porn is cheating.

Imagine your wife picturing you looking at the naked bodies of other women in sexually provocative poses and you masturbating to them. Likely, this is what she is doing in these early hours/days. This is not a pleasant experience for any woman and it feels like *betrayal*.

You may feel you love your wife and that you are simply addicted to porn. You may be thinking that porn addiction is like any other addiction. Perhaps you have really tried to stop and feel like if she could see that you would get a break. While there is science to back up your theory, don't try to sell that to your wife at this point. She won't buy it! Not now at least. Over time, seeing you do all the right things, she may gain that understanding. For now, you need to understand that she feels like you have cheated on her. After all--you looked at other women naked and having sex!

To help you get a sense of this, imagine the reverse were true. Your wife has met a man online and she has sent naked pictures of herself to him and he has sent pictures of his privates to her. She confesses to masturbating to images of his naked body. You are incensed, right? But she argues that she never had sex with him and rationalizes that it really wasn't cheating because she never touched him. How do you feel? Is there really any difference? If you find yourself wanting to argue this point, you likely need to humble up!

Inadequate

As your wife considers your actions she may conclude that she is not enough for you. Whether it is true or not, she likely believes that she has been sexually available to you. So... you looking at porn or acting out communicates to her that you have rejected her body for the bodies of others.

Women in today's world are constantly reminded that certain body types are prized. An endless parade of billboards and ads depicting the "perfect woman" with the "perfect body" are demoralizing for women. Many women feel like they do not have the right stuff. Now your wife feels like you have cast your vote against her also? If you could read her mind, it would sound like this, "Wow, I must be a total loser in the bedroom!"

Grief

Yes, grief! Your wife is grieving some significant losses right now.

- She is grieving her loss of a husband who promised to be faithful.
- She is grieving the loss of her own sexual desirability.
- She is grieving the loss of her trust for you.
- She is grieving her loss of reputation or social standing as she contemplates people finding out about your problem.

Grieving has many stages and takes time to move through. Let your wife grieve! Attempting to short circuit her grief will undermine the potential for healing in both of your lives. Again, expect her to grieve and give her time and space to do it well.

Confused

At some point in your marriage, it is likely you have been made to feel that you should be able read your wife's mind. If you are like me, you are not very good at reading minds. So, let me draw from my own personal experience and my experience as a therapist that has listened to many betrayed women.

These are likely some of the thoughts she is having right now.

Has everything been a lie?? All those valentine cards, those gifts, those walks we took, were they all a lie?? Has he ever loved me?? I thought we had good sex, even great sex, was all that just second best for him?? What else is he doing sexually?? Maybe he has had lots of affairs?? What other things has he lied to me about ?? I'm so confused!!

Do not expect her to:

Get over it quickly

You simply cannot put a timetable on the process of healing and restoration. I don't know how long it took for my wife to forgive me. While I had told her how sorry I was a thousand times, I never asked for her forgiveness. Over time, things simply got better between us. Several years after I started working with clients who struggle through these issues, we were talking about how difficult it is for women to trust again after a betrayal. She stopped me and said she wanted to tell me something. She said, "Steve, I just want you to know that I trust you completely." She unceremoniously changed the subject and I left the room to cry. I sincerely believed that I had regained her trust years before this moment. Her actions indicated that she trusted me. But hear me gentlemen, it was almost 5 years before I heard it.

When we fail and apologize, it is natural for you to want people to forgive you for your misdeeds. For your sexual sin, you may have truly repented and have sensed God's forgiveness. That forgiveness feels great. In fact, you may be feeling better than you have felt in a long time. Well, here is a sad truth. Your wife is not God. Living with your long-term lie and now being free of it has left you in a great place. With your disclosure, you have traded places in a way. You now feel free and liberated. She falls into a new and very painful place. Her forgiveness will not be immediate.

"Forgive me" should not be in your vocabulary right now. When a wife first learns of her husband's brokenness, she is trying to find emotional footing. She simply cannot forgive until she knows what she is forgiving. Her ability to forgive you largely depends on your actions over time. Some women simply will never be able to forgive, but when men are truly repentant and humble, most wives are inclined to forgive. Yet, no matter what her inclination is, until she finds emotional stability and truly understands what she is forgiving, true forgiveness is not possible. Even if she were to recite the words, she isn't capable of genuine forgiveness in the early stages of processing your disclosure.

Again, give it time, lots of time!

Understand why you did it

You may not even fully understand why you did it. Any answer she can come up with right now implicates you. Any answer you may come up with feels to her like you are minimizing. Even if she is questioning her own role in your failure,

she is smart enough to know that you are the one who acted out and therefore the one who broke the marriage vows. If you start offering reasons, they will be perceived as excuses. This will likely have her questioning the sincerity of your plans to quit the behavior.

Be sympathetic

Anger is the appropriate response to being betrayed. Ultimately, she may understand that there are reasons that contributed to your sin/addiction, but early on she is simply emotionally incapable of sympathizing with you. To be honest, there won't likely be any sympathy for you from anyone for a while. That's why we conduct therapy groups. Join one soon! Seriously!

As you process all this information, you are likely asking; WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Step 1- Get help!

Admitting that we need help for many men is difficult. We tend to be independent and self sufficient, or at least we like to think of ourselves that way. But, I am praying you believe me when I say; "Walking through this process is not something you can do on your own." Without the work of God's Holy Spirit working in your life there is little hope. When you combine the power of the Holy Spirit with trained Christian counselors there is every reason to expect powerful results.

If my wife and I hadn't gotten help from professional counselors who combined their education with the power of the Holy Spirit, we likely would not have stayed together. Their role in my restoration process is to a great extent why I am a therapist today. When you walk the road to restoration, you need a roadmap. Without one, your chances are slim. Often without any intention of doing so, the wife or the husband can undermine the potential for healing. The issues that you and your wife face are complex and being with people who are trained to walk the journey with you is absolutely essential.

Some people manage to put their marriage back together on their own. Either counseling wasn't available or they didn't want to spend the time or money on the process. The problems associated with taking this approach will most assuredly surface down the road. Couples end up settling for an incomplete restoration that will only last so long. People can mask or fake it for a while but then the old patterns return. You don't want a remodel, you want a new house. My strong recommendation, based on personal experience, is get professional help! In the long run it is cheaper than divorce. Besides, getting well feels a whole lot better than staying sick and moving your furniture somewhere else.

Step 2 - Humble up and Own it!

This is critical so I'm putting it in caps; BE HUMBLE - OWN IT!! Completely own it! Don't blame anyone one or anything for your failures. When I was first found out, I tried to minimize what I had done. She was already in real pain. I

rationalized that I didn't want to hurt her anymore than she had to be. What I did not realize was that in her mind it was horrible already and the only thing that would lessen her pain was to see a broken, humble man own his stuff, all of it.

I was fortunate. Even though I was found out, I was at a place where I was so miserable in my deceit and duplicity I wanted out. I remember begging God to help me get out of the mess I was in. He answered my prayer. His answer was pain. I kept trying to make it better by talking. He finally just told me to "shut up." He told me that there were only three words I could say. No more defenses, evasions or minimizations. He told me not to ask for forgiveness. He said there are only three words from me that He would honor. Those words were: I am sorry!

So, for about a month, I wept myself into a little puddle on the floor and told my wife I was sorry. If you were to ask her about it today, I'm sure she would tell you that the repentant posture I took, the humility I displayed, the tears that I shed, moved her toward forgiveness far more than any clever rationalization, deflection or minimization ever could have.

Man up! Humble up! Own it! Don't blame anyone! Embrace your pain and hers!

Step 3 – Disclose well!

As a therapist, I'm often asked, what level of detail should I disclose? I get questions like this: Should I give her all the details? Isn't it enough that I tell her I look at porn? Why does she want to know what sites I look at? Isn't it enough that I tell her I had an affair? Why does she have to know whom, when and how often?

Every woman is different with regard to the level of detail she needs about her husband's failure. My wife met me at the door for two weeks with a notepad of questions. She wanted all the intimate details of everything I had done. I literally felt like she was filleting me alive in these sessions. I could not have endured it if I had not heard specifically from the Lord on the matter. This is what he told me to do, so I will pass it on to you. *He told me to answer all her questions honestly.* I did so for about two weeks.

Finally the bomb exploded: Is there anything that you haven't told me? Wow, talk about a loaded question! I wracked my brain and actually came up with something that she had missed in her interrogations. Out it came! The last little bit of the deceit. The last piece of the ugly puzzle was on the table. Then something really strange happened. I gained complete and utter peace.

My detailed confession brought me to a place of humility that I would never have found without it. God knew I was too proud to be a good husband, father and friend. He knew I needed to be broken into a thousand little pieces so he could put me back together His way.

I understood that my wife was asking because she needed to know. I now understood that the interrogations were as much for me as they were for her. I needed to confess everything to her for my own sake. With everything out in the open, should she decide to forgive me, there would never be her concern of some new disclosure.

Remember, God loves you enough to bring your sin out and into the open if it is in your best interest. It's a tough love, but it is a really wonderful love because he knows what you need.

I have counseled women that did not need this level of detail. Some actually preferred their husband not disclose details. They simply did not want to have that information in their minds. So, here is my counsel on the matter: ***Give her the level of detail that she asks for.*** If the story goes much deeper than she asks you to go and you feel the need to get it all off your chest, confess the details to your pastor or counselor. One way or another, you need to confess it all to someone. If not, it will fester in you. Confessing it to God and man opens the windows and doors of your soul. Have no hidden compartments because secrets make friends in the dark!

Step 4 – Do the right thing today!

I am often asked by men that have failed, “what do I do now?” My answer is always the same. That was my question as I contemplated what life would be like going forward. That question was deeply rooted in my own shame. I had been untrustworthy. I wondered how I would ever rebuild trust with those who had once trusted me but now see me as a failure. I went to the Lord with this concern and he gave me a profound solution. He told me to do the right thing today. He told me to do the right thing again tomorrow and then to do the right thing again the next day. Integrity is renewed moment by moment. You can't have integrity for tomorrow. You can commit to it, believe you will be strong, but not until tomorrow's challenges and temptation rise up in your path can you show what you are made of.

So, I learned to strive for integrity in the moment, every moment of every day. It's about building a track record of behavior. After a while, people see that you are who you say you are. They will believe in you again. I can tell you from experience, regaining someone's trust is a powerful motivator. Feeling like people trust me again keeps me wanting to be a better person, every moment of every day. Just keep thinking: Integrity Now!

Start walking and don't look back!

As you walk the road toward sexual integrity there are some things I can promise you and there are some things that I cannot promise you.

I cannot promise that your marriage will remain intact.

You can do all the right things and still lose your marriage. It simply comes with the territory. However, if you consistently apply the principles shared here and tap into the power of God's Holy Spirit, you have a really good shot at making it work. My wife finally told me she was waiting around to see what God could do in my life. She told me that she was glad she didn't give up on me and let some other woman have a man that God had given an upgrade.

I cannot promise that everyone will forgive you.

Whether you are forgiven depends largely on your actions. Think for a minute about people who have wronged you or disappointed you. If they were to come to you and apologize, then you saw them day after day working hard to do the right thing, what would you do? You would likely forgive them. Not everyone who hears your story will be privy to the changes in you. Yet, those who recognize your efforts are truly likely to forgive you.

I cannot promise that people will get the facts right.

I'm speaking from experience when I say, "the rumor mill will have you doing things you would never think of doing." They will get it wrong. It will be exaggerated. That is as predictable as human nature. But please hear me... DO NOT DEFEND YOURSELF! LET OTHERS SPEAK THE TRUTH ON YOUR BEHALF. A defensive posture takes up a lot of space. It feels really big. You need to be humble right now. You need to be really small and really sorry. I know you will have to work hard on this, so I am warning you now.

I can promise you lots of pain.

Yes, lots and lots of pain. Coming clean may be excruciating. It was for me and I know it has been for many I have seen in my counseling room. Yet, pain is a great motivator. Rather than trying not to feel it, embrace it. Let God redeem it! Allow the Holy Spirit to take your pain and use it to motivate you to walk in sexual integrity.

Oh, and can I just say, "It is okay to cry." I cried literally buckets of tears as I stumbled along the path in those early days. As my wife and I were drawing closer and feeling like we may survive, late one evening I told my wife that I felt better. I remarked that for the first time in about two months I hadn't cried that day. And at that, yup, I started crying. We both cried, this time because we felt good.

*I **can** promise lots of hard work.*

It is amazing to me how hard men are willing to work when they are motivated. If we want something bad enough, we will move mountains to get it. They say, "The proof of desire is pursuit." So... roll up your sleeves and go to work. I mean, sweaty, ditch-digging kind of work. Nothing you have worked for is as important as what you work for now. Integrity is worth the effort.

*I **can** promise you integrity.*

It may seem odd that I would actually promise you integrity. The truth is, it is not my promise. It is God's promise, but it is conditional. No matter where this road takes you, you can have integrity. Whether or not your wife stays with you, whether or not people forgive you, you can still have integrity. Here is the condition; if you will do the right thing in the moment, moment by moment, day after day you will have integrity.

In the early days of my journey, I didn't know if my wife would stay with me. I didn't know if my wonderful daughters would ever respect me again. I didn't know how I was going to make a living. The only thing I could hang onto was that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus had forgiven me. I envisioned myself as a Wal-Mart greeter, standing there, all day long saying "hello" to people. I saw myself in church on Sunday worshipping my Lord. I could see myself someday maybe getting to teach a Sunday school class. I knew I would make it. You know, that would have been enough for me.

But evidently it wasn't enough for the God of mercy and amazing grace. Through my brokenness and healing I have realized that our God specializes in restoration. It is in His nature to forgive and restore. In my case, he may be showing off a little. Today, my wife and I are enjoying an entirely new kind of marriage. I cherish the moments I have with my daughters in a way I wasn't capable of before. All my friendships are special to me and I enjoy finding ways to enrich their lives. God has provided for us financially in amazing ways. I am a blessed man!

So... I know you can do this if you will look to Him for the strength! He did it for me. God hasn't run out of mercy and power. He has plenty left for you. He didn't use it up on King David or Peter or the thousands of other men who have failed and been restored. Dive into His Ocean of amazing grace. I still haven't found the bottom. Be a man of Integrity now and each moment going forward. It may be a long hard road to walk, but in the end, the destination will make you glad you took the journey.

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