



RESTORED

TRUE STORIES OF LOVE AND TRUST AFTER PORN

MATT & CAMERON FRADD

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Published by Catholic Answers, Inc.

2020 Gillespie Way

El Cajon, California 92020

1-888-291-8000 orders

619-387-0042 fax

catholic.com

Printed in the United States of America

978-1-941663-46-2

978-1-941663-47-9 Kindle

978-1-941663-48-6 ePub

All italics added for emphasis in citations from Scripture and ancient texts are the author's.

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Confessions of a Redeemed Heart

By ELISA

If there's one myth I've heard repeated over and over again, it's that marriage will cure a man's desire for pornography. This—as you may already know too well—is false. Elisa began buying into the lie that she was somehow to blame for her husband looking at porn. I know many wives who think this way. They think, “If only I was prettier, bustier, more adventurous in bed, if I wasn't so critical, or if I [fill in the blank], he wouldn't turn to porn.” But this, too, is false, and it's imperative to realize that. Listen, you can't cure a porn addict by giving him more sex for the same reason you can't cure a gambling addict by giving him more money. In both instances the addict is seeking not money or an orgasm, but the rush, the high, the thrill of the chase. The porn addict has trained himself to believe that sex should be something on-tap and made-to-order. He has bought into Burger King sex: he prefers it his way, right away. The problem is with him, not his wife.

—MATT

I fell in love with the man I married when we square-danced together as children. I was nine; he was fourteen and the most beautiful boy I had ever seen. What I felt was not the physically driven love of teenage years but the innocent, starry-eyed love of childhood. He was beautiful and funny, and I adored him.

Chester was the son of family friends, so I saw him occasionally over the years. Every moment is sealed in my mind in perfect clarity, every detail brilliant, every moment catalogued. It wasn't until many years later that Chester noticed me. I was nineteen and in college; Chester was twenty-four, working full-time, and living on his own. We were reintroduced at a reception following the memorial for his grandfather's death and quickly discovered we had a lot to talk about. The subjects ranged from photography to travel, and after that I don't remember much of what we discussed, but I know the conversation continued.

I was recovering from an unhealthy relationship. I had hesitated to call Chester for that very reason—I didn't want him to be a "rebound." But I felt compelled to call him, and after a few minutes of conversation I was laughing so hard my stomach ached. I realized that I hadn't laughed in a very long time. This was no rebound relationship; this was me finding life again. I quickly decided that I didn't want to stop having conversations with this handsome, intelligent, hilarious man.

We started dating and were married a year and a half later. Chester and I had a practical view of marriage. Neither of us imagined marriage was easy, and we were willing to work and sacrifice for the other. Because of that foundation, our first year of marriage was wonderful.

We fought often in our early years, but we always talked through things and grew and learned. What surprised me was that Chester was nearly always right. His logic was flawless,

and he seemed to be able to pinpoint my errors with astonishing clarity. Being quick to find my own fault, I assumed I had married a man of impeccable character and an intellect that clearly surpassed my own. I began working at communicating and not overstepping his boundaries.

When we were dating we developed a love of long car rides. Conversation was easy, and the ebb and flow of subjects would keep us engaged for hours. We often had spirited debates. Once we had children, long road trips took on a different character. Frequent potty breaks, loud wailing from the back, and incessant demands for snacks made conversation more difficult. We preferred traveling at night. Once the kids were worn out from their antics and fell asleep, we rediscovered our love of discussion.

It was on one such road trip, driving home from a short vacation to the mountains, that Chester confessed to me he struggled with masturbation. While our four children dreamed in the back of the van, he explained what he felt most guilty about was that he sometimes fantasized about being with other women.

I remember looking at my bare feet on the dashboard as what he was saying sank in. I thought of the beautiful women we knew and wondered if he had fantasized about each one. I remembered how safe and confident I felt around other attractive women, because Chester had always seemed uninterested in how other women looked. He was scornful of men who pointed out how attractive women were. I had convinced myself that he was not as sexually and visually driven as other men. In a way, it gave me confidence. Even though my husband desired me less often than I would have liked, I assumed his desire was limited but fulfilled by only me.

I had created a false reality. I had been ignorant, and now

my so-called reality was fragmenting and falling apart. I was confused, and deep insecurities I thought had been laid to rest in my teen years reared their merciless heads. They began to pick away at my confidence in myself and in my marriage. I cried a lot on that drive, silently so as not to wake the children. All the while Chester was explaining that he knew his fantasies were rooted in a deep fear of intimacy. He said he had repented before God and couldn't lie to me anymore. When we got home, I told him I forgave him and, in tears, we made love.

Chester gave me permission to speak with a friend about what he had confessed. I knew Cameron's husband had struggled with an addiction to pornography, and I figured even though my situation was less intense, it would be safe to talk to her about what I was feeling.

As we talked and I explained Chester's confession, she casually asked, "And porn isn't a problem for him? In my experience men need something visual." I assured her that Chester had no issue with pornography—he struggled only with masturbation. She accepted my answer but regarded me with a look of mild disbelief.

I was surprised when her question stayed with me, buzzing around my mind like an annoying mosquito. I kept seeing the look in Cameron's eyes when I had assured her that porn was not a problem for Chester. Doubts crept in. Finally, I decided to ask Chester.

"Chester." We were in bed at this point—we lived with my parents, and our bedroom was the only place we could be alone. "I know you confessed having an issue with masturbation, but you never looked at porn, did you?"

There is something about silence when it follows such a question. That silence can scream at you that you have yet again been so wrong, so stupid in your assumptions. The sec-

onds dragged on, and he uttered no emphatic denial. It was then I knew how wrong I had been. I was a fool.

“Yes,” he answered finally. “I didn’t think the pornography mattered. I thought I had confessed the worst of my betrayal and didn’t want to add to it.”

At this point there was a throbbing in my brain that became harder and harder to ignore. I was hit by so many emotions at once. I sat bolt upright in bed and then started to get up. “I’m so sorry, Elisa,” Chester said tearfully. “I thought I wouldn’t want to look at pornography anymore once we were married. I would make it for long periods without looking at it, and then I would go through periods where I used it all the time. Often I would look at porn to stop myself from fantasizing about someone other than you. I felt it was less of a betrayal.”

Safe to say that any self-confidence that remained after the first confession was now shattered. I felt like every perfect moment I had ever experienced with Chester, every beautiful aspect of our love, was swept away. In the place of my tarnished memories were questions. Did he actually love me? Was I enough? Was he satisfied with me only because he had the option to escape into fantasy with perfect images? Could I ever trust him again? How could I have been such an idiot? How could I believe him when he said my post-baby body was wonderful and enough for him, when all the while he was having his pick of airbrushed perfection?

“Elisa, I am so sorry,” my husband was saying tearfully, “I love you, I didn’t want to hurt you. I didn’t think the porn was important, but I see now that it was. I am sorry.” With a strong act of the will I put a temporary hold on the questions that were tearing me into bits inside, because he needed a response.

I had the sense I was holding his heart in my hands. Here was my formerly emotionally distant husband humbly of-

fering me something I had always wanted: himself. I had a choice. I could take his heart and crush it in my pain-fueled fury, or I could give him an undeserved gift. In those seconds I remember focusing on Christ, on what he had given me.

“I forgive you.” The emotions were pulsing within me. “I forgive you, but I need to be alone.”

Maybe if we had been in our own home I would have yelled at him, cursed, made him feel small. Perhaps I would have attempted to inflict a fraction of the pain I was feeling. Instead, due to our living situation, I was forced into solitude with God. I walked out of the house into a crisp fall evening. There were a million glorious stars twinkling above me, subtly reminding me of truths I would need.

I am thankful now that it was God who took my anger in that moment instead of my broken, insecure husband. In reality, it was God with whom I was most angry in all of this. And only he is big enough to handle the anguish and agonizing brokenness that this life holds. As much as he may hate to see us hurting, he hadn't prevented it, and it was for this reason he held the focus of my fury. This was the gist of my tirade—er, prayer.

“Are you f***** kidding me, God?! Porn? Masturbation? Dreaming of women other than me? When I have always desired sex? I thought this man was what you wanted for me. I have strived to obey you. I have not been perfect, but I have loved you and desired to be in your will. And now I am here? How could you let this go on for eight years of marriage, when at any point I would have forgiven him? How could you let me wonder for so long what was wrong with me because I seemed to desire intimacy more often than my husband, and wonder why he seemed disinterested in me? It wasn't because he lacked desire—it was because he had satisfied himself, because he preferred that over me.

“I can’t do this! I have given him everything, and it is not enough. I have loved him deeply and served him out of that love. I have shared my own struggles, been vulnerable, trusted him—and *you* implicitly—and I have been led like a lamb to the slaughter. How can I go on? There is nothing left of me. I am broken beyond repair. I can’t do this! I can’t do this! I need you, Jesus.”

I sobbed for what seemed like hours but was most likely minutes. When I picked myself up, I knew that if I waited any longer to go back to my husband, I would never go. I wanted to run away from my life and never look back. With a final prayer for strength, I returned to my bed and my broken husband and forgave him.

The weeks that followed were a battle. I believe the second confession was the truth. When things are still hidden we cannot be fully in the light. After confessing to his addiction (though he didn’t call it that) and receiving my forgiveness, Chester was a different person. He looked at me in a way I hadn’t experienced since we were dating. I was the only person in the world to him. He beamed at me with such a light that I felt I could endure any pain, survive any agony. I began to sort through the emotions slowly, which is my way. Chester walked with me day by day, encouraging me and reassuring me. He constantly reminded me I was all he wanted. I began to rebuild my confidence and trust in him on the foundation of those words.

Chester encouraged me to ask him regularly how he was doing with his struggle with lust, masturbation, and porn. He put an accountability program on his computer and phone. I did not ask anything of him after the first confession. I allowed him to decide what he needed to do to protect himself. I did ask after several weeks of being his accountability partner if he would also have a man in his life as a second

accountability partner. I was concerned about the pressure it put me under to be the only person checking in on him. He complied without question.

We made many practical changes in our life. We stopped watching movies unless we had checked the rating on a parent-friendly website. We stopped watching television except the occasional unobjectionable show. Chester read to me in the evenings, and we spent a lot of time talking, which usually led to physical intimacy. I began to lose weight. The stress took its physical form in a lack of desire to eat, which was nice because being thinner and healthier helped rebuild my self-confidence.

I began to believe that Chester's problem could be solved by his being known fully and accepted by me and by my complete willingness to meet his physical needs. It helped that sex made me feel safe and fully loved. It also seemed to provide healing to both of us.

My relationship with God didn't grow much during this time. I talked to him and I wrote many prayers in my journal. I realized that I was much angrier at God than I first realized. It took me a long time to figure out that I blamed him more than Chester for how long this sin stayed hidden in our marriage. I knew God could have allowed Chester to be found out at any point.

It took a while, but I came to understand that God had allowed the lies to stay hidden until Chester couldn't live with it and was compelled to tell me. I have since learned that this is a blessing—many women do not get the gift of a confession but instead are forced to find the evidence and confront a potentially unrepentant man.

Six months passed, and Chester had not expressed a desire to look at porn. We moved from my parents' house to a new state and city. We had our own house and began to find our

own rhythms as a family. It was a stressful yet joyful time. We found a church community and began to make friends. I felt more and more confident in our relationship. We had moved past the initial period of Chester constantly affirming me, but we stayed connected and made love regularly. I assumed the problem was solved.

After being in our new home for several months, I decided to visit a family member overnight. Chester agreed to stay home with our four children so I could get some much needed time alone. It was such a refreshing trip. On my early-morning drive home, I stopped at a coffee shop. Chester called me just as I sat down to enjoy my cappuccino. I answered my phone cheerfully but was stunned into silence. He was sobbing,

“Elisa, last night I looked at porn and masturbated.” It took me a moment to figure out what he said. “I’m so sorry. I wanted to tell you before you got home. I know you have several hours of driving left, and I thought it better to let you process instead of telling you when you get back to the kids.”

“I forgive you. I love you. I will see you in a couple of hours.” I was so calm in the moment, but I could feel the panic and despair setting in. He told me he loved me and that he was sorry again before he got off the phone. I sat and drank my cappuccino in silence, staring off into space.

I was thankful he chose to tell me on the phone so I had the drive back to process the information. I pinballed between sobbing and complete numbness. My thoughts, though not wholly unhealthy, rambled along, sinking into deeper and deeper ruts of hopelessness. I started to think, “If that is what he really wants, let him have it!” I called my friend Cameron, and she prayed with me. By the time I got home, I had collected myself enough to get through the week. We had planned to get away for the weekend without the kids, and I

knew I would have more time to process then.

Our getaway was hard, but perfectly timed. It felt like a gift from God placed at exactly the right moment. I had a frightening realization: Chester still desired pornography. This struggle within him went deep and would not be going away any time soon. No amount of sex, lost weight on my part, or meeting his needs would change him.

I was out of control. My confidence again was shattered; I had built it on a foundation of sand. The only thing I could hold onto was that he had told me; he had been honest and repentant and had confessed immediately. It was small comfort, but at least I could trust him in that.

At one point during the weekend, I had to get space, so I went for a walk. I didn't even put on shoes. I ran across a small road and crossed a bridge over a beautiful tributary to reach the beach, where I ran out onto the sand. It was a chilly spring evening. The sun had set. I walked beside the breaking waves and cried out to God in my pain.

Jealous anger overwhelmed me. I was not a woman denying her husband intimacy. I delighted in connecting with him, and I wanted every part of our marriage to be pure. Every time he chose to indulge himself sexually, he was denying me what was mine. Our bodies were part of our covenant.

In a split second, I was hit with a message so pure and bright it stopped me in my tracks. It was as if God spoke directly to my heart as I stood barefoot in the wind with the waves gently washing over my feet.

“Oh, Elisa, don't you understand? This anger you feel is just and right. It is what I feel every time you take what is mine and squander it. I feel this jealousy every time a life I created is lived for the glory of something or someone other than me. You are getting a glimpse into my heart for you.”

I started crying again, this time out of guilt, feeling I was

given a tiny picture of what my God feels when I worship idols instead of him. He gave humanity himself, and we bumble along, unable to see beyond ourselves. I confessed all the things I had placed before him and praised him for his faithfulness. This is an excerpt from the journal I wrote after my walk.

A light breaks through the greasy black
The unquenchable flame
Born to perfect death
Here to conquer; victory over sin
This light calls me home
My Jesus, perfect sacrifice
Strip me of myself that I may know you more
That I may reflect your light
unto the world.

We returned home feeling disheartened. Yes, we had connected and made some progress in understanding the nature of Chester's struggle and the depth of the wounds, but we had a long road ahead. We went back to real life unprepared for how hard it would be. I cried out to God daily, begging for healing. I didn't feel like this experience had made me stronger—on the contrary, it made me into a broken, insecure, irrationally emotional, semi-crazy person.

As the weeks passed, Chester and I hashed out many things from before his first confession. I realized that when I forgave him, I had no idea what I was forgiving. It was similar to the way when you vow to love someone through the good and the bad you have no clue what you are vowing. I might be dealing with confessions every six months for the rest of my marriage.

I took my wedding ring off for a few days as I forced myself to face this reality. Was I at peace with the vow I had made? I felt like if I decided I was, it would be like walking

into the line of fire, knowing more bullets would rip through my body. I didn't know if I would be able to take the pain. After several days of praying, I put my ring back on. If God had been there for me so far, I could trust him to continue to be there for me.

One day Chester informed me, very matter-of-factly, that he had realized he had no obligation to tell me anything about his struggle, even if he chose to indulge in porn and masturbation again. It was his struggle, and I had nothing to do with it. Thus, in one conversation I was stripped of my last shred of safety in our relationship.

The following months were a rollercoaster. I was plagued by fears that he had returned to his old way of living. He refused to let me in on how he was doing. The thought of being blindsided or being lied to again was terrifying. I tried to hide the emotions I was feeling out of fear he would pull away further. Nothing helped.

I found a ray of light in reading the Bible and praying. I praised God for who he was when I didn't have the space to praise him for what I was experiencing. I felt like I was hanging on by a thread. I felt I couldn't live without Chester and I was going to lose him—either he was going to choose porn or someone else over me, or my emotional chaos was going to drive him away.

To add to my insecurities, Chester was going overseas on a business trip. I was going to be home alone with the four children for fourteen days, and my husband was going to be in another time zone on the other side of the world. I knew this trip would hit Chester with every one of his triggers: physical exertion, stress, and a potential feeling of failure—not to mention being alone in a hotel room for two weeks. I knew he would be struggling every night, and when I asked

if he would keep me updated on how he was doing, he said no. It was a terrifying thought.

I didn't push him. I felt like God was telling me I needed to let Chester go on this trip and succeed or fail on his own in his battle against sin. I prayed fervently before he left, and we had several hard conversations about his struggles and about my own issues with communication and trust. In the end, no amount of conversation could have prepared me for Chester being gone that long.

Four days in, after horrible communication with Chester and many intense episodes with unruly children, I broke down and surrendered. I had nothing left. I didn't have even the illusion of control over any aspect of my life. I admitted my lack of control and confessed to God that it terrified me. When I had no more words to pray, I borrowed those of David from the Psalms.

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God” (Ps. 69:1).

It was in this dark moment that I released Chester completely and threw myself on Christ's mercy. That was the turning point in my journey, though there was no amazing change from that moment in my marriage. No, the change was in me: I finally realized that I had made Chester an idol. I relied on him to make me feel secure, loved, and protected. Any human would fail in this. Only one could sustain me, one who had paid the ultimate sacrifice to purchase me from death. I found a new life and a new perspective.

During the rest of the time Chester was gone, I spent most of my down time alone. I read my Bible, prayed, and read a book titled *Undeiled: Redemption from Sexual Sin, Restoration*

for Broken Relationships that provided much wisdom and enlightenment. It validated the pain I had experienced and illuminated the fact that nothing I could do would change my husband. He needed Christ to change him.

When I share my story with people (or ask their reaction to pornography), they respond typically in one of two ways. Some downplay the gravity of pornography/masturbation by calling it a “man thing,” just a leftover of our animalistic, evolutionary roots that should be tolerated or ignored. Others seem to want to “lock it down,” to deal with the issue by controlling the action: “Your husband needs to find sobriety.”

The first response is frustrating, to say the least. It leaves no room for my dignity and my right—let alone God’s right—to my husband’s heart and body. As much as I understand the second view, there’s still something missing. I could threaten, demand more control over our Internet and my husband’s computer, check his browsing history, force him to go to meetings, threaten to withhold sex—the list goes on. Yet the deep root of all sexual sin is in the heart. I knew that my husband’s choices were a reflection of something much deeper and that preventing the action would not mean my husband was healed. I think this quote clearly illustrates the point:

“The drive to ‘look’ isn’t an overpowering sex drive or an addiction to sex, but an overpowering, demanding, selfish desire. Pornography, with its inherent ability to be secretive with easy accessibility, uniquely meets that demand. The essence of your husband’s condition is an unwillingness to be told what to do spiritually, relationally, and sexually. You need a new man, not just a change in behavior.”²

2. Excerpt from an article by Dr. Harry Schaumberg: restoringsexualpurity.org/your-husband-looks-at-porn-now-what/

When Chester got back from his business trip, it turned out he had looked at porn several times. I cried and was angry, but the emotions passed much more quickly than before. It helped that I was no longer building my confidence on my husband's perfection but on Christ. I spent a lot of time in prayer, and slowly Chester started opening up to me again.

It was clear that, as much as he fought it, my husband still wanted pornography. I knew that I had no control over my husband's desire and choices. What my husband needed was not threats or boundaries but a heart change. I chose yet again to not demand anything of Chester.

Don't get me wrong. When you are dealing with addiction, it is crucial to protect yourself by removing temptations. But my husband had to make those decisions on his own. If I were to tell him to delete an application from his phone, he would feel trapped, and it would not lead to a heart change. Instead, I did what was probably the most difficult task of my journey: turn control—or at least my illusion of and attempt to control—over to Christ. I began to live by this verse:

“Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious” (1 Pet. 3:1–4).

The other beautiful thing that came out of this choice to release my husband to Christ was that I fell in love with Chester in a new way. I saw that he was lost, choosing his own will

over God's, as I often did myself. I was able to focus on the wonderful things about him: he is hard-working and loves me deeply; he is a devoted father and always my best friend. I had lost sight of how incredible he was because his struggles had been my focus.

I started learning more about prayer, and I had a new way to intercede. I began daily to take my fear, anger, and woundedness to the cross in prayer. I started praying for my husband to have a changed heart. I stopped asking how he was doing with his struggles and instead I asked how he was feeling and what he was thinking. I listened with a God-given detachment to his fears about work, our marriage, and the kids. I was able to care for his wounds, because I had given mine to Christ.

Instead of asking him to delete apps off his phone that I knew were a problem, I asked him to pray with me every night before we went to bed and read a short devotional every morning with me. We started a once-a-week study of the book *Undefined*. The study gave us a space to talk through some hard questions and begin to process healthily our individual and collective need for redemption.

Through this study my eyes were opened to the ways I had allowed sin to exist in my life, either because the sins were small or seemed justified. I began to confess to Christ my fears, self-pity, and my desire to control my life. I began to ask questions of myself: Was I being like Christ? Was I living in my woundedness and self-pity instead of living in the forgiveness I had found in Christ? Was I living in my commitment to my marriage and loving my husband, not for my own comfort but for God's glory?

Redemption is often an agonizingly slow process. In spite of that, it is amazing now to look at how much Chester and I have changed. We recently passed the date that marks a year

since his first confession. We are not perfect, and we still have very hard conversations. I am under no illusion that my husband is “healed” and he will not ever choose porn and masturbation over real intimacy with me. I choose not to think about my husband’s potential to fail. Instead, I acknowledge his human weakness before the Lord, and I do battle daily for him in prayer—not for my own sake but for his sake and out of obedience to and love of Christ.

I still get bogged down by my fears and insecurities. I feel valueless and pointless at times. If Chester is working on a project and we aren’t able to connect regularly, I often fall into an emotional tailspin. I assume something is horribly wrong with our relationship and we are headed for failure. The difference is, I recognize it for what it is: not trusting Christ. I have begun to notice much more quickly what it looks like when I start down that emotional path, and I am faster at casting my burdens on Christ, who is able to handle them.

There have been many victories for me in this journey. One of the most important has been the ability to thank God for my trials. I have started to see how God gently used them to move me closer to him and to refine me. I have a relationship—no, a life—with Chester I wouldn’t have had if I had not been brought to a place of complete reliance on God and his mercy. Chester has a relationship with God that has progressed without me trying to help it along or control it.

My husband and I have an incredible relationship that has been forged in the crucible of sexual sin. We love being together and spend most evenings reading, talking, and playing games. On date nights, we enjoy a beer and fries at the local pub and stare at each other and smile. We talk about our fears and our hopes and dreams. We hold hands and kiss every day and make love often. Honestly, I don’t think I could imagine to ask for more than this. I am thankful and blessed that God

gave me a husband who is so much better than the man of my dreams.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned” (Song of Sol. 8:7).