

## TRUE FREEDOM

One sentence testimony: Broken by lies and a spirit of deception, God found me in my sin, took my shame upon Himself, and restored my birthright as his child. His awesome love for me is transforming a spirit of deception into a spirit of humility and truth.

I first became exposed to pornography when I was 10 when I found some magazines my older brother was hiding. At that point I didn't even know what I was looking at, but I knew my brother was hiding it for some reason. Soon after that I was at a school friend's house and I told him about the magazines, so he showed me his dad's Playboy magazines and filled in some information gaps I had at the time. This was before I had started puberty, so it was all still pretty academic to me. The only thing that was exciting about it was that it was very secretive and gave me a common bond with my friends.

When I told my brother, he showed me the rest of his magazines and started giving me a lot of information about what I was seeing. He began telling me about things he did with the magazines, and even though I wasn't doing that yet, he assured me that soon I would be enjoying them too.

I wasn't long before I found out for myself what he was talking about. At first I was deeply troubled by what I was doing. I felt shameful, but no one had ever told me what I was doing was wrong, and certainly no one was asking me about it directly. But it had to be wrong if I had to be so secretive about it and I had also heard my brother say about a hundred times that if mom found out we were in big trouble!

Over the next few years I found I needed the magazines pretty often, and when my brother either through away his stash or hid it better; I decided to get some myself. Remembering my friend's dad's Playboys, I broke into his garage while they were away to get them. Unfortunately they weren't there. I was becoming desperate. It was at this point I learned how to steal them from stores, and have probably stolen 10 of them over the years. I find this time to be significant in that I learned I could put aside my moral teachings and common sense to reach the goal of obtaining pornography; a practice that continued until just recently.

When I was in Jr. High I found some pornography under my parent's bed, and began to look for other places my dad might be keeping it. I did find more, but what I found was nothing like what I'd seen in Playboy. There were pictures of some pretty bizarre and disturbing things. When I confided in my brother he told me he already knew about it and that it was ok because it was all just fantasy, no harm in it. I believed this and used it to rationalize what I had found.

When I got to high school and could drive, I discovered adult videos, which quickly became the stimulus of choice. I was making up all kinds of excuses to be able to go to different parts of town in order to rent them.

During this time I considered myself to be a Christian, but didn't really know what it was to truly have a relationship with God. I never asked God for help with the pornography, mainly because I told myself I didn't have a problem with it. Every once in a while I'd throw it all away and tell myself I wouldn't do it anymore, but I never asked God's help with it and I always went back.

Fast forward to the morning of Tuesday, July 22, 2003. While at work I was arrested, handcuffed, taken to the police station and charged with 1 count of indecent exposure, 1 of 26 men rounded up as part of a sting operation at a Harrisonburg adult book store. When I was released several hours later, I left the main part of the jail and went into a waiting area and found my wife, my pastor, and a good friend from work. As soon as I saw them I turned away and started crying. All the shame, embarrassment and regret came pouring out of me in uncontrollable sobs. Those people were there because they loved me and it brought me face-to-face with all the lies I'd been living up to that moment.

It was later that day that I experienced the most powerful manifestation of God's love for me that I have ever known. Through tears I told my wife and my wife's parents the details about why I was arrested, that I had an addiction to pornography, and I needed help. Instead of condemning me like I expected, we all held hands and prayed together, all of us crying and asking God for new hearts, minds, and souls. Then when my pastor came to our house, he also prayed with my wife and me, then told me about Greater Hope and strongly suggested I get in touch with them. I then called the other members of my small group from church and confessed what happened. We all met that evening at our church to pray together and seek God's guidance.

It was then that I began to understand the lie I had believed all this time. That no one would love me if they knew; that they would condemn me and have nothing to do with me. But just the opposite was happening. They were loving me and praying for and with me. I knew I had a long journey ahead of me, but I also knew that God had not judged and condemned me and would be with me on that journey.

Even though I began to see God's love through those around me, I still did not know what it was to be completely given over to Him. When Living Waters started, I began to understand how I was living in the false self, afraid to deal with the hurts I thought I had effectively buried. I learned quickly that I would never gain freedom if I did not allow God access to all my heart, including all my pain.

As I have allowed God access to the hidden areas of my heart, he has shown me such incredible love, mercy, and patience as this sinner gives more and more of his false self over to the transparent light of Christ.

I've come up with a little personal motto of sorts, "What is the distance between me and God? It is the distance from my knees to the ground." Because it is there, on my knees before my Lord and Savior, that I truly find freedom.