

AFTER

Overcoming His Secret Life with Pornography

SHOCK

A Plan for Recovery

I'd like to put this book in the hands of every wife who has experienced the trauma of discovering that her husband has turned to pornography. Reading *Aftershock* is like sitting down with empathetic counselors who offer a roadmap to recovery.

GARY CHAPMAN, PhD

Author of *The 5 Love Languages*

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with Jeremy Keeton

Aftershock: Overcoming His Secret Life with Pornography: A Plan for Recovery

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A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

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Cover design by Julie Chen. Interior design by Eva M. Winters.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Condie, Joann, author.

Title: Aftershock : overcoming his secret life with pornography: a plan for recovery / Joann Condie ; with Jeremy Keeton.

Description: Carol Stream, Illinois : Tyndale House Publishers, [2020] |

Identifiers: LCCN 2020016880 (print) | LCCN 2020016881 (ebook) | ISBN 9781589976979 (cloth) | ISBN 9781684282944 (ebook) | ISBN 9781684282951 (epub) | ISBN 9781684282968 (kindle edition)

Subjects: LCSH: Husbands—Sexual behavior. | Wives—Religious life. | Pornography—Religious aspects. | Women—Psychology.

Classification: LCC HQ28 .C66 2020 (print) | LCC HQ28 (ebook) | DDC 306.872/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020016880>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020016881>

Printed in the United States of America

26 25 24 23 22 21 20

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER 1

AFTERSHOCK

*God gave us a spirit not of fear but of
power and love and self-control.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

AFTERSHOCK DESCRIBES YOUR REALITY after discovering your husband's pornography use or other sinful sexual behaviors. The marriage you thought you had has crumbled; shock consumes your thoughts and imagination; and you're grappling with how to live with the pain of betrayal soaking into every aspect of your life. You fear that more incidents of sexual unfaithfulness have happened, and more might happen in the future.

Dara's story illustrates her progression from preshock to shock and then to aftershock:

The day Dara's son turned three, everyone gathered for his birthday party. Who could've wished for more? Friends, grandparents, and a smiling toddler bustled

around the house eating cake and singing “Happy Birthday.” Timmy delighted in all the attention and the pile of presents waiting to be opened. Dara’s husband, Geoff, even grilled a few steaks. The party was a super memory. The snapshots on Facebook proved it.

The following day, though, was a day of shock. “Happy Birthday” and steaks were yesterday. Anything normal in Dara’s world was yesterday. This morning, Geoff accidentally left his phone behind when he left for work, and after a number of text messages came in, Dara decided to look at them in case she needed to call him. She didn’t know his password, but she quickly guessed it.

When Dara saw the images and words on the screen, she realized that there was a lot she didn’t know about her husband. She knew Geoff well enough to figure out his password, but apparently she didn’t know him well enough to suspect what she was now staring at.

Dara looked at the screen in disbelief! Her heart raced as she saw a photo of a scantily clad woman in a provocative pose, with words beneath the image. It was evident that Geoff had found this woman online and had recently been sexting with her.

Dara sank into a kitchen chair. She was reeling. She couldn’t move. She stared at the trappings of the birthday party that she’d been happily cleaning up only moments ago. *Did that party just happen yesterday?* she thought.

“I can’t believe it,” she said aloud. “I know he’s been online a lot, especially late at night. But I trusted him.

I thought he was playing one of the games he seems so addicted to.”

In desperation she called Geoff’s office and tried to sound calm as she asked the receptionist for his extension. The sound of Geoff’s voice mail rattled Dara. She couldn’t handle leaving a message. Her hands shook as she laid her phone on the kitchen table.

What have I missed? she thought. *What does he get from this that he doesn’t get from me? Aren’t I enough for him? And this woman has his cell number! Do they talk to each other? Has he met her in person?*

Dara picked up her phone and called her next-door neighbor.

“Connie, something has come up, and I need to run an errand. Could Timmy stay with you for a little while?”

Connie agreed, and Dara managed a smile when she dropped Timmy off to play with Connie’s daughter.

Dara drove to Geoff’s office building and pulled into the parking lot before dialing the number again. She asked the receptionist to tell Geoff that she had his cell phone and he needed to run down and get it from her.

By the time Geoff met her outside, Dara was standing beside the car with tears streaming down her face.

“What happened? Is Timmy okay?” Geoff yelled as he ran toward her.

“Yes! Timmy is fine!” Dara stammered. “It’s *this!*” she said with obvious anger as she handed Geoff his phone. The provocative photo was on the screen.

“Your online girlfriend has been texting all morning.”

Geoff’s face turned scarlet as he took the phone out of her hand.

He tried to deny that he knew this woman. He fumbled and stammered his outrage that someone would send such messages and a photo to him.

“I don’t believe you!” Dara shouted between sobs. “How could you? I have to go. I left Timmy with a neighbor and need to go get him.”

Geoff tried to reach for her, but she hopped into the car and sped away before he could offer up any more lies.

Later that night Geoff came clean, or so Dara thought. His story sounded real, convincing, and pretty remorseful. He said he’d been curious and started experimenting online.

“It’s incredible what’s available on some of these sites,” he said in an innocent-sounding tone.

“I never meant to actually contact anyone. It just got out of control. This woman emailed me, and the next thing I knew, we were texting each other. I’m so sorry. It will never happen again.”

Dara wanted so desperately to believe him. One mistake was just that—one mistake. She accepted his apology, but doubt needled her. Her world was scrambled, and she didn’t know what to do. She wanted to trust Geoff, but a nagging feeling told her she couldn’t.

The next day Dara checked Geoff’s whereabouts every hour and looked through every business card he’d

emptied from his coat after his last business trip. One of the restaurants' business cards was wholly unfamiliar to her. Her heart raced as she began to panic.

That night Dara and Geoff had a big argument about his behavior and her doubts. Then he clammed up and slept downstairs. She couldn't stand it. She loved him and hated him all at the same time.

Living in Aftershock

You may be able to identify with Dara's story. For most women who face a devastating experience like this, the details might not be exactly the same, but the results often are.

There are many women whose husbands lead secret lives of pornography use or other sexual compulsions. This appalling discovery sends a massive shock wave through a woman's life. Like a tsunami smashing into a peaceful shoreline, the unforeseen revelation of a husband's lies and sexual behavior ravages everything in its path and sweeps away any remaining illusions of a secure and happy marriage.

Unfortunately, like natural disasters, relational disasters often get worse before they get better. A tsunami isn't a single wave; it's more like a wave train. According to scientists, the aftershocks following an initial cataclysm can be equally dangerous. They're vast, unpredictable, and capable of collapsing damaged buildings that survived the original shock.

In the same way, some husbands wait weeks or months after the initial shocking revelation before admitting to other sordid behavior. After years of shameful self-talk, many men cope by minimizing and suppressing their sexual history, even deceiving themselves. As a result, they don't initially understand or

remember all of the things they need to confess. Or in spite of their best cover-up efforts, new evidence comes to light and exposes them.

Some men who commit to a recovery process make a full confession quickly and clearly, but for most men, it takes weeks to grapple with reality and gain the skills to fully disclose their secrets. But staggered disclosures are usually more hurtful to wives than getting the whole truth up front.

Staggered Disclosures

It's important to understand the phenomenon of staggered disclosures because your husband may divulge more details about his behavior over time. This is also why it's useful to get professional help early on, though couples rarely do. The vast majority stumble through the early weeks of their crisis as the wife tries to extract all the details of her husband's bad behaviors, and the husband struggles with how to reveal more to his wife. Such interactions are so emotionally charged and complex that objective guidance from a well-trained professional is virtually essential to wade through the muck. If you are still new in your process, do all you can to get help at the earliest stage of disclosure.

My heart goes out to the many faithful wives who struggle to save their marriages but get knocked down again and again as the aftershocks keep coming. Being aware that there may be more to your husband's story can help lessen the shock if additional betrayals are revealed.

Knowing about staggered disclosures may motivate you and your husband to seek help sooner rather than trying to unravel the tangled web of your complicated relationship on your own.

The following examples of staggered disclosures may seem surprising or extreme to you. Yet they're situations described by women who suffered through their husbands' staggered disclosures. (The husbands' names have been changed.)

- “My husband, Connor, emphatically claimed he only viewed pornography and nothing more. But following a routine gynecology exam, the doctor said I had an STD [sexually transmitted disease].”
- “My husband was still on probation for viewing pornography on his workplace computer when his employer found new evidence. He was immediately fired, and we lost everything we saved for.”
- “I was offended when Cooper confessed to going to strip bars, but he assured me that he had stopped years earlier. He was supposed to be on a business trip, but then he had a heart attack at the home of his secretary just twenty miles away.”
- “Ever since we got married seventeen years ago, my husband and I have argued because he flirts with every female in sight, even though he denies it. Our senior pastor knocked on the door last night to report that a woman in the congregation had accused my husband of fondling her.”
- “When my husband was in seminary, I was proud of him for getting help for his pornography addiction; he said he was cured. We are pastoring our third church, and his assistant found pornography on the church computer. She told the elders, and now everybody in church knows.”

- “I never, ever got over the humiliation of Brayden’s affair during our honeymoon in Hawaii. I got a call Saturday that he was seriously injured, so I rushed to the emergency room. His girlfriend was crying by his bedside.”
- “I agreed to watch porn with my husband the first year we were married, but Jeb finally agreed with me that it was wrong. On our fifth anniversary, he announced with a smile that he’d bought a membership for a couples’ swinger club—like I should be happy.”
- “I was sick to my stomach when I found my husband’s regular [heterosexual] pornography. But then I found his homosexual porn. He later said that he didn’t think it was necessary to talk about his childhood sexual play with other little boys; he considered it in his past.”
- “Miles got abusive whenever I asked him to stop watching adult movies on TV. But I got a call from the police this weekend; he was arrested for being a Peeping Tom.”

Take Hold of Your Imagination

These examples of staggered disclosure aren’t intended to throw your emotions into a tailspin or cause your imagination to run rampant. You need to be well informed, but don’t grab on to every example as something that will happen to you.

Your husband’s response might be completely different from the stories these women shared. You may be blessed with a husband who chose to tell you immediately when he realized how out-of-control his behaviors were. Or perhaps as soon as his sexual compulsions were exposed, he told you the entire truth, with no secrets withheld. Some husbands are truly repentant

and remorseful with a godly sorrow, eager to mend their ways, and ready to cooperate and seek treatment.

If that describes the man in your life, your road to recovery won't be nearly so rough. So don't leap to extreme conclusions about your husband's sexual compulsions, but also understand that you're living in the aftershock of one crashing wave of destruction.

Chapter 7 will provide specific guidelines to follow, whether your husband is motivated to work toward inner transformation or is resistant to change. But right now, while your emotions are raging or numb, just hang on. Even if you fear there is no hope for your marriage, take a deep breath. Try to believe that you've taken a valuable step forward by opening this book.

You Are Not Alone!

If you're feeling isolated, I want to assure you that you aren't reading the words of a woman who has lived an unscathed, victorious life floating above the clouds. I walked through my own valley of pain a number of years ago. I've been wounded by my own bad choices and the offensive behavior of others in my life. In addition to my professional credentials, I come to you with the experiences of my own hurtful past.

I've also worked with hundreds of couples over the past two decades who were in circumstances similar to yours. I understand what you're going through, and I want to help by coming alongside you as a sister and a fellow sharer in your difficult journey. The Bible tells us that God comforts and encourages us in every trouble so that we will be able to comfort and encourage others with the comfort we've received from Him (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). I now know that working

through my heartaches leads to peace, joy, and healing. My earnest prayer is that you will also benefit from facing and working through your pain so that you can experience God's wonderful healing.

A Large Sisterhood

Here's another story about a cell phone:

Hannah hadn't told anyone, not a single person, about her troubled marriage. On the contrary, for fifteen years she'd been wearing a smile and telling everybody that she and her husband, Noah, had a great relationship. If only folks could have taken a look behind closed doors or seen the pain and questions in her heart!

In reality, Hannah and Noah's marriage was filled with a multitude of problems. When she vocalized her frustration, he invariably shut down and withdrew. Neither of them knew how to resolve conflict in a healthy way, so no argument ended well. Their ongoing resentment spilled into the bedroom, resulting in an entirely unsatisfactory sex life, especially for her. But Hannah told herself that this was due to their crazy schedule and the fatigue that comes from raising three active children—factors that did make it difficult for them to find time for one another. Still, she couldn't shake a nagging feeling that something was wrong at a much deeper level.

Then it happened. Hannah's suspicions led her to pick up Noah's cell phone while he was in the shower. She quickly scrolled through his text messages and

discovered he had been texting suggestive messages and images to an old high-school girlfriend. In one fell swoop, all of her worst fears seemed to be confirmed. Suddenly that nagging feeling made sense. Apparently there was something more to their lack of intimacy than mere busyness and fatigue.

Hannah was waiting for Noah when he came out of the bathroom, wrapped in a towel and scrambling around looking for his phone.

“Have you seen my phone?” he asked. “I need to make a quick call.”

When she confronted Noah with the disturbing intimate messages she’d found, he scolded her, accused her of snooping, and dismissed her like a naughty child. He was just a normal male having a little fun that had started with high-school companions on social media, he argued.

“What’s the big deal about chatting with an old friend? Besides,” he told Hannah, “I will never meet up with her in person. Don’t make a federal case out of this. It’s not like adultery, so just drop it.”

Wounded and confused, Hannah added to her own pain by putting herself down and feeling guilty for being suspicious in the first place. Life slipped back into its normal frantic routine, but as the days passed, it became obvious that she and Noah were drifting further and further apart. He approached her less and less often for any kind of intimacy. And when she took the initiative, he simply brushed her off.

After numerous attempts to get Noah to change,

Hannah finally took the risk of sharing her secret with someone else. That someone was me.

A Troubling Reality

When I was pregnant with my firstborn, and later as I raised her, the women I knew shared their parenting knowledge—helpful information they had gathered by trial and error. Moms coached other moms, and we all learned from one another.

Sexual compulsions, on the other hand, aren't usually a topic women discuss when they get together, and stories like Hannah's are all too prevalent. She finally did talk to me in a professional setting, but she told none of her friends or family. Shock and pain reverberated inside her as she longed for answers on how to cope with the aftershock of her husband's behavior. Hannah was unprepared for the kind of shock that washed over her.

I never thought this would happen to me, you might be saying to yourself.

You've probably been aware of the widespread use of pornography but never really thought about having to deal with such a hurtful issue in your own life.

The sad truth is that pornography use and other compulsive sexual behaviors are extremely common in contemporary society. The problem is extensive, both inside and outside the church. The reasons for this are obvious: declining morals, universal internet access, sexual objectification of other human beings, salacious imagery on TV and smartphones, and increasing cultural pressure to tolerate deviant behavior.

Compulsive sexual behaviors may be common, but that doesn't make them any less painful and destructive. All anyone has to do is google the words *pornography addiction* to find

countless statistics about its use and equal quantities of advice on what to do if you're a victim of its damaging effects.

Please do not google any aspects of this topic! Information found online and in some books gives terribly conflicting advice to the undiscerning reader, such as “Learn to be a better lover, don't tell anyone, watch pornography with him, and join a couples' swingers club” to the opposite advice: “Kick him out of the house, expose him in front of the family, or find the best lawyer you can afford.”

Who can answer your haunting questions or provide appropriate coaching? Unfortunately, good and healthy input is hard to come by. If you somehow find the courage to ask your friends, you may receive encouraging words of comfort but not really any helpful advice.

A friend may have sufficient suggestions for potty training, but when your marriage, family, and entire future are at stake, you want to be sure to get appropriate professional advice, along with any comfort or well-meaning encouragement your friends can offer. You need well-researched information to fill in the gaps. You need comfort, hope, realism, and some practical direction. Hopefully that is how this book will help.

A Critical Turning Point

Nearly every couple I've worked with through the years whose marriage survived looks back and credits the wife's response and her choices for redemptive hope as the critical turning point for the damaged relationship.

The wives in these situations committed to heal and grow personally in the hopes that their husbands would do the same. They faced a choice: They could close the door to a continued

relationship or leave it open just enough for their husbands to step through it toward healing.

You may struggle with the thought of even wanting a restored relationship with your husband. Your trust may be so shattered that you're at the point of despair. Right now, you might harbor so much disappointment that you've literally slammed doors shut to gain distance from your husband. I understand. I really do.

Giving a second chance to someone who might not deserve it is often beyond our human ability. But extending hope, grace, and an honorable “fight” for your marriage is more than a feeling; it's a God thing. It's strength that comes from beyond you, strength that you can willfully access as part of Christ's ongoing work in your life.

You will need support from others as you decide to fight for your marriage. Surround yourself with *wise* advice. Some people would have you roll over in passivity, while others might justifiably be so angry for you that they'd pay your lawyer bill today!

The decision to invest in giving your marriage a chance isn't a guarantee of success, but it's *right*, and it reflects God's heart and hope. He always aims to repair broken things and make them even *better* than they were before.

The following promises that God gave to the Israelites can be encouraging truths for you as well:

Behold, I am doing a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.

ISAIAH 43:19

Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion;
instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot;
therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion;
they shall have everlasting joy.

ISAIAH 61:7

The Spiritual Light of Christ

Satan wants to kill your marriage. While plenty has already been done to threaten it, don't succumb further to his death lies and schemes. Don't cope by going into denial about the painful truth of what's been occurring, but *do* strain to see the light of Christ rising on you in the midst of the storm.

Your world might seem quite dark to you now. I imagine you've had nights when, like me, you cried until you didn't think you could cry anymore. But then you did! King David could empathize with us. He wrote, "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping" (Psalm 6:6).

The popular phrase "The darkest hour is just before dawn" is true! But we can be encouraged to know that even though "weeping may tarry for the night . . . joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

Your trial is time limited. The dawn *is* coming. Joy is on the horizon. I can make that claim with full confidence because I have witnessed desperate and broken people being restored. For dozens of years, I have counseled women married to men with out-of-control sexual compulsions. When I first meet these women, they often fear there is no hope for them or their marriages. They are living in a darkness that clouds their vision and prevents them from seeing the light ahead.

But they make a commitment to move forward, step by step, regardless of their situations. They learn about healthy boundaries and self-care, which give them better footing and a sustainable self-respecting pace through this trial. You can make that commitment too. I encourage you to read on and keep going, even when times are difficult and you want to give up.

Difficulties *will* come. The burden you presently carry along with the normal busyness of life may wear you out physically, emotionally, and spiritually. You might wonder how you can possibly find time to keep reading and doing the necessary work for healing to occur.

I'm praying that you will hit the Pause button, take a deep breath, and choose *not* to act on those negative thoughts and raw nerves.

I hope you'll take advantage of the tools in the following chapters. You'll be learning about yourself, the betrayal process, and how your husband likely developed his destructive behaviors. You'll also learn about the dynamics of your marital relationship—the good and the bad—and how you got to the place you are today.

And you'll have the opportunity to make choices that have proved effective in restoring and transforming shattered marriages while still taking care of your own heart as well.

Don't give up!

REFLECTION

Call upon me in the day of trouble;

I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

PSALM 50:15

AFTERSHOCK

The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
the floods have lifted up their voice;
the floods lift up their roaring.
Mightier than the thunders of many waters,
mightier than the waves of the sea,
the LORD on high is mighty!

PSALM 93:3-4

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a special journal for recording your thoughts and prayers as you move through this journey? You'll need one. If you don't have one yet, ask yourself, *What's keeping me from getting a journal and taking a step to write, express, and sort out my feelings on paper? How can I remedy that and invest in what's recommended?*
2. What do the verses from Psalms 50 and 93 say to you today? When or in what circumstances each day do you most need to remember these truths? Post these verses where you're most likely to be at those moments of your day.
3. Psalm 50:15 reminds us that we can honor God even when we're going through something *deeply* troubling. What does honoring God and feeling the fulfillment of obedience and integrity look like for you in this moment?

PRAYER

Lord, the "floods" of my problems and my husband's problems have lifted up, and I feel waves of aftershock pounding against

AFTERSHOCK

me. I'm calling on You, trusting You. And I will honor You. Enable me to do this every day as I'm reading this book, seeking Your deliverance through the comfort of Your Word, and relying on Your help to take the practical steps I'm just beginning to learn about. In Jesus' name, amen.