

LET VIRTUE
GARNISH THY
THOUGHTS

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage between husband and wife is central to our Heavenly Father's plan of happiness. Physical intimacy is a sacred part of the marriage relationship. It allows children to be born into families, and it brings couples closer together throughout their lives.

The adversary tries to thwart the Lord's plan of happiness by suggesting that physical intimacy is only for personal gratification. Pornography encourages this destructive and selfish preoccupation. Pornography depicts or describes the human body or sexual conduct in a way that arouses sexual feelings. It may be found in written material (including romance novels), photographs, movies, electronic images, video games, Internet chat rooms, erotic telephone conversations, music, or any other medium. It is a tool of the adversary.

As you learn and apply the gospel of Jesus Christ in your life, you can withstand the adversary. If you "let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly" (D&C 121:45), you will grow in knowledge, strength, and power. You can receive His image in your countenance and be spiritually born of Him (see Alma 5:14).

FILLING YOUR LIFE WITH LIGHT

The Savior Jesus Christ promises those who follow Him: “Your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you” (D&C 88:67; see also 3 Nephi 13:22–23). Fill your life with truth, righteousness, peace, and faith. As you fill your life with goodness, there will be no room for pornography and other sources of spiritual darkness.

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve observed: “Light and darkness cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Light dispels darkness. When light is present, darkness is vanquished and must depart. More important, darkness cannot conquer light unless the light is diminished or departs” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 80–81; or *Ensign*, May 2002, 70).

You fill your life with light as you pray and study the scriptures with real intent, seeking to know, understand, and follow the Lord. You will find that the word of God has a “more powerful effect” upon you “than . . . anything else” (Alma 31:5). An understanding of true doctrine will help you change your attitudes and behaviors.

Attending Church meetings and partaking of the sacrament, keeping the Sabbath day holy, fasting, and paying tithing will help you keep yourself free of the darkness of the world (see D&C 59:9). Appropriate music and uplifting visual images will invite the Spirit into your life.

Regular worship and service in the temple will also strengthen you.



President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of the fortifying effects of temple attendance: “Make a habit of going to the house of the Lord. There is no better way to ensure proper living than temple attendance. It will crowd out the evils of pornography” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 109; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 102).

As you draw near to the Lord, your behavior and your very nature will gradually become more Christlike. Through personal conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ, you will learn to “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

AVOIDING AND RESISTING DARKNESS

Just as some influences will fill your soul with light, others bring darkness. This darkness most often comes gradually, almost imperceptibly, if you are not vigilant.

Pornography can be devastating. Indulgence in it will deprive you of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. It will darken your mind. It will weaken and can eventually destroy marriage and family life. Those who indulge in it soon feel alienated, unworthy, and



unacceptable to God, to themselves, and to others. They become self-centered and less able to enjoy healthy and righteous interactions with others. They waste valuable time and money, jeopardize their standing in the Church, and diminish their ability to serve others.

Some materials that are not explicitly pornographic can still fill your life with darkness and deprive you of spiritual strength. Television programs, pictures, movies, songs, and books often treat unchastity and infidelity as common, appealing, and humorous. Avoid anything that drives the Holy Ghost from your life.

Wholesome activities will help you and your family draw closer to each other and to the Lord. Limit the time you spend watching TV, playing video games, and using computers for entertainment. Set standards for your participation in these activities, such as restricting Internet use to specific purposes.

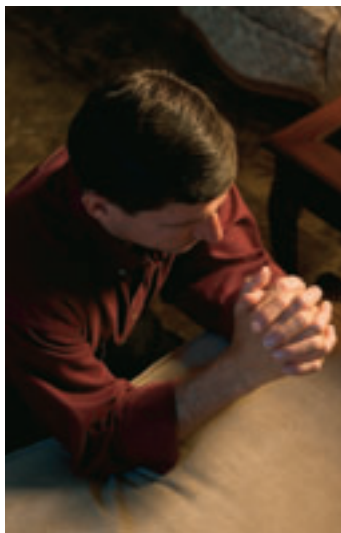
As you determine what to include in your life, ask questions such as:

- Does it invite the Holy Ghost?
- Does it make me feel edified or uplifted?
- Is it aligned with gospel standards? (Compare it with the thirteenth article of faith.)
- How are chastity, fidelity, and families valued?

Those who promote pornography are aggressive in their search for new users, especially on the Internet. They frequently employ deceptive practices. You may sometimes encounter pornographic materials unintentionally. If that happens to you, get away from it immediately. Resist this darkness. Do not let it become a part of your life. Do not dwell on it. You can choose to control your thoughts and redirect them.

FINDING STRENGTH TO ABANDON SIN

If you already indulge in pornography to any degree, you can stop. You have agency to choose your thoughts and actions. The adversary may have misled you in the past, but you have the final choice. You can regain the strength of the Spirit in your life. To do this, you need most of all to know that your Redeemer loves you. He has the power to help you. He died to pay for the sins of all who repent and follow Him. You can draw on the power of His Atonement for hope and strength as you repent. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).



Hope

If you have tried to quit pornography but have been unsuccessful, you may feel discouraged. Satan will try to exploit your discouragement by attempting to convince you that you cannot stop or that the Atonement does not apply to you. These are lies. Because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you can repent and change. The Lord promised that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

Accepting accountability and recognizing rationalization

Individuals rationalize sin by telling themselves, “It is not hurting anyone,” “I only do it occasionally,” or “This is the last time.”



If you indulge in pornography, you need to recognize the truth about yourself and your actions. Seek the Lord through prayer, and He will help you examine your behavior honestly and see yourself and your rationalizations clearly. When you know the truth, “the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Remember that you are a child of God. Through the Atonement, you have power to become like Him. You will never find happiness in sinful behavior. Any involvement with pornography damages you spiritually. Do not risk the consequences of sin.

Repentance and the Atonement

The key to abandoning pornography is found in repentance and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Repentance brings strength and a new attitude toward God, oneself, and life in general. Through this strength, you can turn from evil. You can align your heart and will with God’s plan for you.

Begin with earnest prayer, and humbly ask for help. Your Heavenly Father can increase your desire and strength when you ask with real intent, with a firm commitment to change. The scriptures will help you understand the power and love of God. Your faith will increase in His ability to strengthen you and free you from this bondage. As you forsake your sins and obey the commandments of God, the influence of the Spirit will return to your life.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ has two powerful effects: it cleanses you from sin, and it strengthens you. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve explained:

“When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the Savior does more than cleanse that person from sin. He also gives him or her new strength. The new strength we receive from the Savior is essential for us to realize the purpose of our cleansing from sin, which is to return to our Heavenly Father.

To be admitted to His presence, we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a morally weak person who has transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature to dwell in the presence of God. We must, as the scripture says, '[become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord' (Mosiah 3:19). This is what the scripture means in its explanation that a person who has repented of sins will forsake them (see D&C 58:43). Forsaking sins is more than resolving not to repeat them. Forsaking involves a fundamental change" ("Sins, Crimes, and Atonement," an address given to CES religious educators, Feb. 7, 1992, 12).

Confession

Repentance includes confessing your sins to the Lord. He will be "merciful unto those who confess their sins with humble hearts" (D&C 61:2; see also Mosiah 26:29). Serious transgressions require confession to the Lord's representatives in the Church (in most cases the bishop). An unintentional

encounter with pornography may not require confession to your bishop. However, if you seek out pornography intentionally or if you repeatedly indulge in it or rationalize its use, you should discuss the matter with your bishop.

Help from your bishop

Your bishop cares about your spiritual welfare. He wants to help you. You may feel reluctant to disclose your problem with pornography to him. You may feel embarrassed or unsure of what to expect. Do not allow your fears to deprive you of the blessings of repentance. Through the Spirit, your bishop



can understand your concerns, and he will help you repent. He can become a great ally.

Be honest with your bishop. Do not hide or minimize your sin. Your honesty will help him understand the extent and seriousness of your problem. He will keep your discussions confidential.

Breaking the cycle of indulgence

Indulgence in pornography often occurs in a cycle. If you are engaged in this cycle, you may dwell on inappropriate thoughts, scenes, and images in response to boredom, loneliness, curiosity, stress, discouragement, or conflict. Then you place yourself in situations that lead you to pornography. Afterward, you may feel discouraged and repeat the cycle.

You can break this cycle by identifying and controlling the earliest thoughts and actions that lead you to pornography. Understand your patterns of behavior and your excuses and rationalizations. The earlier you replace negative thoughts the more easily you will avoid the actions that follow them.

The best solutions will be those you develop as you counsel with the Lord, but these suggestions may help:

- Fast and pray for help.
- Identify positive activities that can occupy your time, such as studying the scriptures, exercising, or talking with a family member or friend.
- Change your environment. Surround yourself with pictures, music, and literature that will inspire good and uplifting thoughts. Avoid media, people, or settings that have tempted you in the past. Consider disconnecting the Internet or television cable.
- Learn constructive ways to respond to conflict, boredom, or other negative feelings.
- Confide in and seek support from a parent, a spouse, or another trusted family member.

Your desire to change must be powerful—more powerful than your desire for pornography. Ponder your most sincere desires for your life and the life of your family, and focus on accomplishing good instead of dwelling on your struggles with pornography. Jesus Christ taught His disciples, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:22). The more you fill your life with good thoughts and activities, the less attention you will give to evil.

Availability of professional help

Some people may need additional help to abandon pornography. Addictions are sometimes symptoms of other problems. Your bishop may refer you to a professional counselor who can help you. It is best if you find a counselor who has a good understanding of gospel principles.

HELPING OTHERS

If you learn that a family member or friend is involved with pornography, you may feel discouraged, betrayed, or distressed. In these difficulties, you may find strength as you counsel with your bishop. You may also want to ask for a priesthood blessing from a worthy priesthood holder. You should not blame yourself for the actions of others. Each individual is responsible for his or her own behavior.

You can help your friend or family member as you continue to increase your own spiritual strength. The light of the gospel in your life will lift you and do much to dispel darkness in the lives of those you love. As you seek the companionship of the Spirit, the Lord will guide you. Seek His help through prayer, scripture study, and temple attendance.

The following principles will also help as you interact with your friend or family member:

- Listen carefully. Do not respond with shock or anger. Do not rush to give advice. Talk with the person in a loving and confidential way.
- Be kind and loving, but do not tolerate or join in inappropriate behavior.
- Avoid being critical or controlling. Your friend or family member will be less likely to discuss problems if you respond in a critical or punitive way. Criticism may lead others to hide problems instead of seeking help.
- Support efforts to repent. Express confidence in your friend or family member. Pray for him or her. Help him or her come up with a solution to solve the problem, including specific plans to avoid pornography and to repent. Encourage him or her to speak to the bishop.
- Compliment specific strengths and positive actions.
- Talk together about ways to remove temptation.
- Learn to forgive.

If your friend or family member speaks to a bishop and the bishop does not impose a visible or obvious punishment, you may feel as though the problem is not being taken seriously. Recognize that a bishop is to rely on the Spirit to determine what will best help each individual.





IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD

The Apostle Paul taught the Ephesians how to protect themselves from evil. “Put on the whole armour of God,” he wrote, “that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world” (Ephesians 6:11–12).

As you put on the armor of God, you will protect yourself and strengthen your loved ones. Consider the example of the Nephites, who were frequently attacked by powerful enemies. Every time the Nephites went up to battle “in the strength of the Lord,” they prevailed (see Words of Mormon 1:14; Mosiah 9:17; 10:10). As you rely on the strength of the Lord, granted through His atoning sacrifice, you too can be victorious. You can receive the peace, security, and happiness of being firmly grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The evils of pornography

2 Timothy 3; 2 Nephi 26:22

Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Tragic Evil among Us," in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 63–67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 59–62

Thomas S. Monson, "Pornography—The Deadly Carrier," in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, 95–98; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 66–67

Dallin H. Oaks, "Pornography," in Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 91–95; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 87–90

The sanctity of the body and physical intimacy

Genesis 1:26–27; Psalm 8:3–5; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Alma 39:1–5; D&C 42:22; 88:15

Jeffrey R. Holland, "Personal Purity," in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 98–102; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 75–78

Russell M. Nelson, "We Are Children of God," in Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 110–14; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 85–87

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102

True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference (2004), "Chastity," 29–33

Repentance and the Atonement

Matthew 11:28; Luke 15:7; John 3:16; 2 Nephi 2; 9; Alma 5; 7; 22:1–27; 34:32–33; 36; 39; 3 Nephi 27; D&C 18:13; 19:16–19

James E. Faust, "The Atonement: Our Greatest Hope," in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 19–23; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 18–20

Boyd K. Packer, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 27–30; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 22–24

Richard G. Scott, "The Path to Peace and Joy," in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 31–34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 25–27

True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference (2004), "Atonement of Jesus Christ," 14–20; "Hope," 85–86; "Repentance," 132–35

Overcoming worldly influences

Romans 13:12–14; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Nephi 4:31; Moroni 7:12–19; D&C 11:12; Articles of Faith 1:13

M. Russell Ballard, "Let Our Voices Be Heard," in Conference Report, Oct. 2003, 14–18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 16–19

James E. Faust, "The Power of Self-Mastery," in Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 54–58; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 43–45

Gordon B. Hinckley, "Be Ye Clean," in Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 65–71; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 46–49

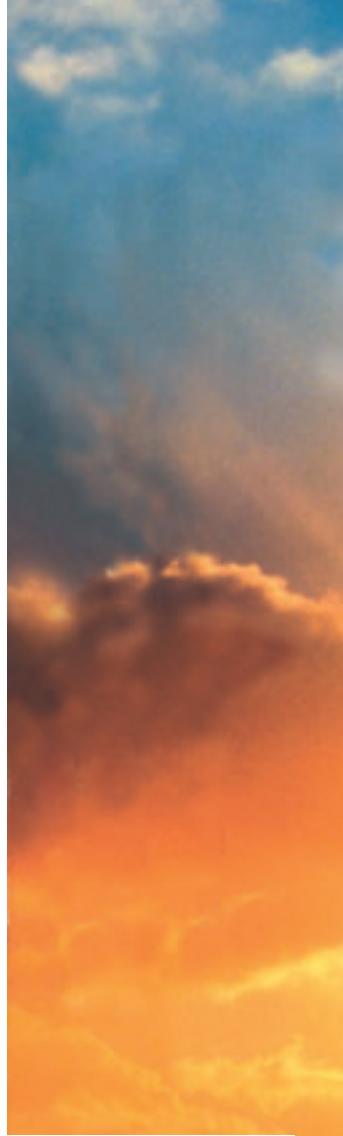
Dallin H. Oaks, "Be Not Deceived," in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 46–49; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 43–46

Boyd K. Packer, "Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts," in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 24–25; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 25–28

For the Strength of Youth (2001), "Entertainment and the Media," 17–19

See also www.combatingpornography.lds.org

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