



EPISODE 16

Coach or Cheerleader — Which Works Best? Supporting Each Other's Recovery from Pornography with Alma and Karen Thurber

[Breaking the Silence Podcast by Reach 10](#) with hosts **Creed Orme** and **Crishelle Simons**

Alma and Karen Thurber return together to share what they've learned about supporting the work each is doing to heal from the impact of pornography. Creed and Crishelle talk with them about how they carve out time for communication, how they make time for each other to do the things that help them keep progressing, and how inspiring it is to see your partner keep growing. They have a tradition of a weekly inventory, including praise and appreciation for the good things they've noticed about each other that week. Pornography is so isolating and makes people want to close in and not open up and be intimate, but at the same time intimacy is the cure in a lot of ways and helps people break out of their shell. Don't miss this great conversation with ideas that can help every relationship grow.

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Creed:

Welcome back listeners to Breaking the Silence. Before we get started with this episode, we want to remind you that we have a link in the show notes and on our website, www.reach10.org, an anonymous link for you to click and share your story, share questions

that you have, any comments. We'd love to hear your feedback, hear your stories, just to, you know, maybe we might want to know about your story and interview you in the future. Your stories or your questions and comments will help us, help guide our podcasts in the future as well. So please, we want to hear from you. Please share that with us, on this link in the show notes and online at reach10.org. Just as a reminder, we are in the midst of Covid-19, so we're all separate. Unfortunately we're not all here together in person, but through zoom technology we are meeting together, but we are so glad to have Alma and Karen again with us today. Thank you for joining us.

Karen:

You're so welcome. Thanks for having us.

Alma:

Glad to be here.

Creed:

Today we are discussing three topics about managing pornography and sexuality within a married relationship. The three main points that Alma and Karen want to discuss with us today are communication, increasing intimacy, and supporting each other's recovery.

Creed:

I'm so excited to hear from both of you. I thought your last individual episodes were so incredible and had some really great insights from both of your perspectives. And I'm excited to hear them together. So let's start with that first one. Help us understand how your communication has maybe changed or shifted through the recovery process.

Alma:

Yeah, so the first thing we wanted to mention as far as communication goes, is just prioritizing communication over a lot of other things. And I would say communication is one of those things that's very easy to put on the back burner and just say, "okay, we'll have that hard conversation or I'll talk about my emotions later." But making it a really high priority and saying, "Hey, no, I'm going to finish my homework later, or we're going to carve out this time of our day and make this a really high priority," because there's conversations

that need to happen in any marriage relationship. But especially when there's someone who has an addiction or some other trial similar to that.

Karen:

Yeah, I agree. So I think how it's changed since we've been going through the recovery process is we're getting better at it, I think. Because there are hard topics we have to talk about, we communicate more frequently. And we're talking all the time to make sure that we have, we're on the same page making sure that we're understanding where each other's at so that we can help each other.

Creed:

I think that that's a really good example of healthy communication in a marriage of just being able to really check in and seek to understand each other every day. Which sometimes I think, especially when life gets busy and probably with a new baby. Has that been a hard transition as you become parents?

Karen:

Oh yeah. I think anytime there's a baby or an extra addition to the family, then intimacy's a little harder. Not just sexual intimacy, but just intimacy, getting to know each other better. And I feel like you become a new person when you become a parent. Like I knew Alma before he was a dad and he knew me before I was a mom. But things change. You become parents. So I, Yeah, it's definitely affected, I think it's definitely affected our relationship for sure.

Alma:

Yeah. And I would say just adding to that, carving out time to have those conversations is just that much harder. Because one of us, if the baby's awake, one of us almost always has to be with the baby and it's kinda hard to have that conversation with the baby there and I don't know. So it just has to be even more deliberate now. Be like, okay, we need to make sure we're on the same page and talking and communicating or else things will escalate and get worse in the future. Right.

Creed:

Yeah. That sounds like a tricky balance to hold, but it sounds like you're both willing to engage and carve out that time. Practice. See how things go and make it work. That's awesome. Good luck with making that communication happen. It's an important part of your relationship.

Creed:

I have a question about communication for you both. Do you ever find that your emotions get the best of you as you're communicating? And if so, how do you sort through that?

Karen:

Oh man, this question is for me. Yes, all the time, especially with the hard topics, but sometimes like not even when it's like a, particularly hard topic, emotions always get the best of me and I often end up crying or I dunno, just like feeling super emotional, whether it's anger or hurt or just sad or I don't even know, but I'm crying. Yes, it does happen a lot. So I think it's, yeah, I don't know. It definitely does. And I think how we cope with that is just talking through it. If I don't talk through it, then sometimes I like to tell Alma like, okay, I'm feeling off, but I'll just go to sleep and I'll feel better in the morning. And most of the time that doesn't work. Most of the time I need to talk it out. And once we talk it out and he knows exactly how I'm feeling, then I suddenly know how I'm feeling because I didn't know how I was feeling until I talked about. So, and it's important to validate. It's really important to hear him validating my emotions 'cause like I think I talked about that in my, in the other podcast is sometimes I just don't validate my feelings and I just kind of let them run their course and then feel bad about it later that I felt that way.

Alma:

Yeah, I would add to that that it's important to remember and keep in mind that we're emotional beings. We're not just thinking people and that's not a bad thing, to have emotions and having even an emotional breakdown or like extremely emotional conversation isn't like a result of having a weaker will or anything like that. It's just a result of being human. And I think it's really important to validate yourself and validating each other with like how we feel is a huge part of that. But with the example my wife gave, it's super important to not wake up the next morning and let's say the emotions did pass and be like, Oh, yesterday I was just being stupid. Like to feel all those things. Everything's fine. I

don't think that's healthy. I think we need to accept that. Like, no, it was real for me then and I was working through those things. And it's not wrong to feel that way 'cause then it'll just, it'll just be worse next time those emotions come.

Creed:

Totally. I think emotions are so important to recognize, validate, and process through. There's this awesome book I'm reading right now called The Language of Emotions. So I'm definitely not an expert in this, but I definitely think, and this is what the book talks about, is that emotions tell us what's happening around us. If we're starting to feel anger, perhaps that's a reason to talk about boundaries. If we're feeling sadness, what does that tell us? If we're feeling fear or feeling happiness? So it's really important and I'm glad you guys have that mentality of validating, processing, feeling emotions. I definitely agree that that is so important to do and very healthy,

Creed:

Very, very cool. How does your communication help you in your intimacy and let's kind of transition into that increasing intimacy. How have you, how have you done that, especially with recovery? Maybe what have been some hurdles that you've overcome and what have you learned about intimacy?

Alma:

You want to start?

Karen:

Yeah, I'll start. Transitioning into intimacy, something that we do weekly. This is a great part of communication as well as intimacy. Weekly we have companionship inventory. If you've ever been a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, weekly you have to evaluate how your week went and you have to talk about things that were hard or how your companionship is going. And how, and things that you have noticed about the other person, things that they've done well and things like that. We did this before we got married and it has followed us through our marriage and we're married for like two and a half years now. And so it's been a huge blessing weekly to have that. Talking about how...Just recognizing what the other person's doing throughout the week and having that planned time to say, listen, I really noticed that you were working on this this week. You did

a really good job. I'm grateful for...I'm grateful for how you how you took time to make sure you were studying your scriptures or I'm grateful that you were such a good dad or things like that that we go through. And that's been a huge blessing and has helped us feel more intimate because intimacy is closeness or oneness, right. And so that's one way that I think emotionally that we've been able to increase our intimacy.

Alma:

Yeah. Amen to that. I don't know how much I have to add other than just saying like intimacy for us, like definitely sexual intimacy is important, but when we're talking about intimacy it's a lot bigger than that. Just intimacy in all aspects of our marriage is really important. And so that includes making sure we're going on dates and communication is a huge part of that. Making sure we're setting goals together, like trying to be healthy or just have well-rounded relationships. So it's not just like one thing. So, yeah, I think Karen said it right though.

Creed:

Are there any other tools that you both are working on or have to increase that intimacy in addition to the, companionship inventory?

Karen:

Something that we've done since January is that we both monthly we have a topic of study that we work on. So for example, this month of March we've been working on prayer and just strengthening our prayers and making sure that, I guess making sure that our prayers are more sincere and just studying the topic of prayer. And that's something that really has strengthened us when we get to talk about it. And we don't always talk about it, but when we do sit down and talk about it and say like, this is what I learned about prayer, or Hey, you should listen to this talk that I listened to or whatever. I think that has also helped us be spiritually intimate as well and be strengthened that way.

Alma:

Yeah. I would add to that. Just in general, we share our goals with each other a lot. They don't always have to be the same goal, but often they are. And when we're working on something together that brings us closer together.

Karen:

Yeah, definitely.

Creed:

Have there been any hurdles that maybe have been difficult to overcome as far as intimacy, especially with pornography and recovery?

Karen:

I can think of one right now. Well, having a baby with us he, I wanted him to stay in the bedroom with us just because I had like mommy fear, I guess something was going to happen if he was in the other bedroom. So we had a crib in here for a long time and I just wanted him to stay there with us. But Alma was concerned about us being intimate in every way. Right? And felt closer when it was just us. And so that was a hurdle that I had to get over. We talked about it and it was a long discussion and we continued to change things, but we moved him from the bedroom into a different room and I can still go and check on him and I've overcome mommy fears, things like that. But for me, that was something that I had to overcome.

Alma:

Yeah. I'm not thinking of another example right now, but I think just in general with pornography and intimacy, pornography is very much so isolating and making you want to close in on yourself and not open up to other people and not be intimate, ironically. And intimacy is both harder, at least for me during those hard days or weeks. But then it's also kind of the cure in a lot of ways and helping me break out of my own shell and get outside my own head. So, yeah, I dunno if I have a specific example, but definitely it is both a big challenge, but also a huge help when we try and work on our relationship in that way.

Creed:

That's fantastic.

Creed:

That was a really interesting phrase you used and I think is so accurate. I love it. Ironically how pornography causes us to decrease the actual intimacy we can share with those people around us. Definitely. It is very isolating. It's all about one person, and pleasurable, that's

why we do it, but it causes you to close in, so, wow, just another reason not to use pornography. Just so that we can focus on the intimacy with those around us.

Alma:

Yeah.

Creed:

And I want to transition into our third topic, which is how you supported each other and in your recovery and how that has transitioned and changed your relationship and how that maybe continues to evolve.

Alma:

Yeah, I would definitely say there's a lot of overlap between a lot of these topics now that we're kind of just talking about them all, but, as far as supporting each other's recovery, I would say the biggest thing is planning. We already talked about weekly planning and how companionship inventory is part of that, but then also weekly and daily planning and prioritizing each other's daily things that they need to do to make sure they're doing okay spiritually, emotionally, physically, in every way. And just making sure that I'm giving Karen enough time away from baby, away from other things that she can get her scripture study done, so that she can exercise, so that she can take care of herself. And then that she can do the same for me so that individually we're both doing okay and we may have different things that we need to be working on for our individual recoveries because our process of healing and our individual journeys are individual and different in very distinct ways. And so just understanding that I have a need to do certain things from my recovery, kind of like what I talked about in the podcast by myself. There's certain things that helped me in my recovery and she can support me in that and be a cheerleader for me and help me carve out that time so that I am taking time for me and I can do the same for her.

Karen:

Yeah, definitely. I think it's something that's really important is that I'm cheerleading, I'm not coaching. I heard that a lot in the ARP groups that I've been to is that you're not the coach, you're the cheerleader. So if it's encouraging these dailies to happen, but it's not forcing them to. I can't force him to recover otherwise it's not gonna work. And he can't force me to recover if I'm not wanting to go through the recovery process, it can't be forced, but if

he's encouraging me to and if he wants me to.... And if I, I dunno if he's, yeah. If he's encouraging me to, then I have a greater desire to strengthen our relationship, to increase intimacy, to communicate and to do these dailies as we call them: Scripture study, prayer, exercise, things like that.

Alma:

Yeah, I just want to add one more thing to that. I would say that having a cheerleader, okay. Well, having a cheerleader is very helpful. But seeing Karen work on herself inspires me to work on myself way more than having her tell me, you need to read your scriptures. So like having seen her sincerely praying and reading her scriptures and working on her own recovery inspires me to be a better person more than any other like coaching or even cheerleading would do. And so I think, in that way we're supporting each other.

Karen:

Yeah, I really like that.

Creed:

I really love that and I just want to echo that. I feel like recently I've realized that I haven't been reading my scriptures as consistently and I noticed because I saw my husband reading them every morning and I was like, what happened? Like, I've always done this and it just like woke me up. And was very encouraging for me to get back to what I really loved to do. And so I love how you said that and I think that that is a really good example of a very healthy way of supporting each other.

Creed:

Yeah. Are there any other ways that you try to encourage each other or are those just simply the best ways of working on your own self personally, that makes it like, Oh, this my partner is like actually striving to make themselves better so that encourages me to do so. Is there anything else that can be done to encourage a partner?

Alma:

I would just say, I don't want to repeat myself, but like I would say probably the best way and probably the most helpful, at least for me, is just like see her example, but then also like having her be a cheerleader for me and saying, like I noticed you were working on

these things. I'm so proud of you or I noticed that you're working on yourself and that's such a good thing. I'm so grateful that you're building yourself and that you're healing in that way. Even asking things occasionally, like, how can I help you? Or how can I support you more, which ties back into companionship inventory again. But so I think that's like the second most helpful but definitely goes hand in hand. But yeah. And then maybe like the third level, which also can be necessary at times would be like suggesting to them like, well, why don't you work on this? I guess which may be the least helpful of the three but maybe necessary at times.

Karen:

Yeah, I agree.

Creed:

I appreciate that. Is there anything else that you two have found or learned and discovered together that you want to share?

Karen:

Routines are really helpful for us and I struggle really hard with routines. I have, I'm a to do list maker, so I like to check off boxes. So I'll make this huge long list of what I want to do every day. And my mind constantly like repeats those things. So once I check one off, then it starts back at the beginning. I don't know how to describe that exactly, but I don't have a routine. Like I'm not very good at having a routine like seven o'clock, I do this. Eight o'clock, I do this. 9:30, I do this, you know and that's something that Alma's really good at. And it's been hard for me to shift my mentality. But when I do follow a routine and when we have made that plan as to what a routine is going to be everyday things go so much better. And rather than just having lists of to do's, I think that's something that helps us one, to communicate because we already have a plan for the day. Two: increase intimacy 'cause we can plan in a time when we're going to, when we're going to have a discussion or when we're going to go on a date or things like that. And then it helps both of us support each other's recovery cause we get a plan in when you're going to do your dailies, when I'm going to do my dailies, when are you going to take a break from school so I can take a break from baby or whatever, things like that. So, I dunno if that answers your question, but that's something that's helped us a lot I think in our marriage.

Creed:

I love that. No, I really appreciate that. It's been so great to hear from both of you and to hear your perspective together and what's really helping you through this process of recovery.

Karen:

Thanks. We're happy to be here and to be a part of it.

Creed:

Yeah. Thank you very much for sharing. Good stuff. Communication, increased intimacy and support each other in recovery. Great points to remember.