



EPISODE #25

Can You Have a Healthy Marriage after Leaving an Emotionally Abusive Relationship?

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

Our guest today is a young woman who has experienced two very different marriages -both times with young men who had some involvement with pornography. Hear how she realized she was in an abusive marriage and made the heart-breaking decision to leave. In time, she chose to marry again, even though her new husband had also struggled with pornography. Her new relationship and marriage has been wonderful. What made the difference? What are some signs of abusive or healthy relationships? Ultimately, healthy relationships require partners to believe in their own worth and the worth of their partner.

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Creed:

Welcome back listeners. We are really looking forward to this episode today. We have a guest who would like to remain anonymous. She will be sharing a very important story of hers in which she describes two marriages that she has had, one former marriage and one that she is currently in both involving aspects of pornography and abuse, but which have turned out in different ways. The outcomes have been different and we believe that this story is so important to listen to because it describes questions like how can one know if they're in an abusive relationship, what does that look like, how to get out of it, and what

does a healthy relationship look like in comparison? And how does one navigate pornography within their marriage relationship when one partner is using pornography? So we are so grateful to have our guest with us today and we are honored to listen to her story. Thank you so much for being here.

Anonymous Speaker:

Yeah, it's an honor. I've never been on a podcast before, so it's, it's wonderful. Thank you. I guess to introduce myself a little bit. I am 22 years old. I'm a grad student in Orem, Utah. I grew up on the East coast. I am from a family, a military family of seven. And all of that plays a little, a little part in my story. I don't know. Is there anything else that you think would be awesome for your wonderful audience to know about me?

Creed:

Anything else that you like to do? Things you do for fun?

Anonymous Speaker:

Right. I love painting. I love, it was kind of an odd one, but I love video games. Any video games. I'm a huge fan of The Lord of the Rings, reading, writing. I did a lot of singing in high school and that has stuck with me for all of my adult life. Yeah, it's been, life is beautiful. I'll just say that it's been a blast.

Crishelle:

That's so wonderful. What are you studying?

Anonymous Speaker:

So I am studying marriage and family therapy. So a lot of that, I mean, and that's something that I wanted to do for a very, very long time. It was just very interesting to now be in a position where that's my field of study and I can maybe analyze my experience from new eyes, different perspectives.

Creed:

I mean me who has heard your story before, I just understand how much you can empathize with clients and understand their experience to such a deep level because of

your personal experience. So you have much to offer and I'm excited to see where you take things.

Anonymous Speaker:

Well, thank you.

Creed:

Well, thank you so much for introducing yourself and describing yourself to us. Let's go ahead and get started with hearing your story.

Anonymous Speaker:

Right. so let's see. I think, I think there's a little bit of a disclaimer prior to the start of telling my story. I'd like to say that having a romantic relationship with someone who has struggled or who is presently struggling with pornography does not mean that that person will be abusive to you. I've had a lot of friends who have come to me, you know, after my experiences and said, Oh, well I just learned that my boyfriend, this person I love so much, struggled with this and I don't know if I can go through with it now. And, you know, even though I couldn't make that decision for them, I feel like the two shouldn't be connected. It's weird. So yeah, sometimes in our world view they can be conflated. Like, Oh, dang, what's going to happen in our sex life if we go through with getting married or you know, moving in together or whatever, and this person has kind of skewed expectations or what they've seen in pornography and I think very seldom to they truly correlate but they did in my case, which is unfortunate, but people can have very strong and loving marriages and still be imperfect people who have struggled with this thing. I guess another thing that I wanted talk about is that, this is from what I understand primarily a pornography focused podcast, you know, Breaking the Silence, making this, a safe place to talk about it and to provide resources for people who are struggling. And I think it's very, very important to understand the nature of addiction. With that, oftentimes from what I've studied and what I've learned, addiction comes about as a symptom of a greater hurt, not necessarily with a causal thing that multiplies and creates more hurt in other people's lives. With my ex-husband, my abuser in this case, his very, very deeply rooted pornography addiction began and was born out of unmet attachment needs that occurred in his childhood tragedies, personal heartbreaks a sense of insecurity that we can be very, very compassionate for. Also

recognizing that he played a role in choosing what he did, how his behavior changed after that to an extent. I don't know. It's just people don't just wake up one day and they're suddenly like, I'm going to get addicted to this thing. No, it's very, it begins very early in our most formative years. Not necessarily the compulsion, but the behavior of seeking another thing to use pain or feel better or not feel so vulnerable. And I think we all do that to an extent. It's just there are certain people who become entrenched in shame and find themselves drawn to pornography for certain reasons. That's their mental. So my story: so growing up I had a magical childhood. I had loving, loving parents, loving siblings. I didn't have very good friends, which is something that I have since recognized. One friend in particular, one relationship in particular was fairly manipulative and in that very, very long relationship. You know, there was a lot of ridicule and I guess other emotionally abusive behaviors that came with not kind of falling in line and being that person. And so over 16 years of my life I learned that it was very, very virtuous to put my needs aside, to not acknowledge that even had them for the benefit of another person. That person being this friend. And in that period of time when I was about 13, I met a young man who advocated for a different story for me. He heard what had been happening with this friend and he was very much a voice of, Hey, you deserve better than that. This is not a friendship that's healthy. And over the next few years we got really close. We never lived in the same place, but we were constantly in communication, playing online games whenever we could, texting, Skyping, phone calls on important days, all of that. And the best person very swiftly became my best friend. He was a very compassionate and kind voice in my life. Very funny, very gregarious. And it made it better that our friends or that our families were friends for 30 years from the military. It was awesome. Absolutely loved that time in my life. He was exactly who I needed. And over the course of the next few years, you know, 17, 18 he went on a mission I graduated from high school, we got together and we felt like we should get married and it felt like the right thing to do. This friend and I, we'd known each other for better part of five, six, seven years and we got engaged. And it was around that time when this person was a returned missionary, someone who I loved and adored very, very much told me that he had struggled with pornography for the better part of 10 years. And it, it scared me. Yeah. But it wasn't something that ever like deterred me from making that decision. It was still something that felt right. That progressed into an engagement that was very, very difficult. A lot of what most would probably call red flags came up. And I just, all the while I had a hope that this kind good person that I knew was still in there. You know, I

wanted to be that person who had the faith to keep going and to hold out with them and help them recover. I wanted every day for it to be successful and I know he did too. You know, there are obviously parts of him that were very good and kind and he strove for that himself as well. When we got married, over time, and this is where pornography addiction kind of breaks from the abuse line. I don't associate any of the behaviors that he kind of perpetuated in our relationship with the fact that he had viewed pornography. But there was a large sense of entitlement from him regarding our sexual relationship. Very much a, "if I don't get this, I'm not going to be kind to you if I don't get this, you are not fulfilling your covenants." But that entitlement was, it was very difficult, particularly for someone who yearned always to give her spouse the benefit of the doubt and wept with him and held him in situations where he struggled with shame regarding his addiction. It was very, very difficult for me to separate, okay, well what am I responsible for? 'Cause he's trying to say that I'm responsible for his success and his sobriety just because of this sexual relationship. And throughout our entire marriage, we were attending therapy. He was going to addiction recovery meetings. We were kind of checking the boxes, you know, trying to get as much help as we could to make this easy. And it wasn't. And the marriage lasted for two years. About a year in, I started not being able to cope very well with the hurt that I was feeling that I would never validate. I had very much conflated a sense of personal virtuosity and Christ like behavior with always being responsible for his emotional state. And that's really, really difficult in victims of emotional abuse because there is so very, very, very little that tells you after a situation like that what you're actually accountable for in a relationship. And so all of those lines got very blurred for me about that year mark. I started doing some very, very deep spiritual searching. That included going to my own therapy, that included finding all of the books that I could find on, I guess in pornography addiction, addiction recovery, things like that. A lot of very interesting and poignant times in my life where I started to recognize the ways in which my ex-husband was being more cruel in ways that I maybe wouldn't recognize before. And so right after, you know, this had been building and building two years into our relationship, there were a couple of events that kind of form this amalgamation of, not evidence, but enough for me to get on my knees and ask a very difficult question that I hadn't been wanting to ask Heavenly Father. That being whether or not I should pursue divorce as someone who is in the therapeutic world I would never advise a person to make that choice. I would never tell someone, Oh, you have these things going on in your relationship, get divorced. No, that's, this is very much a very like personal

and individual choice. But for me it was the right one and it broke my heart. The impression that I received that that evening was something that I feel like I anticipated. But I never wanted, I mean, you never want to receive that answer. You never want to get divorced, you never enter a marriage expecting it to end. So I received the answer that I was anticipating that being, that I needed to leave. And I also was kind of clued into the fact that I couldn't tell him that I was going to leave. And that threw me for one. My original plan was to kind of lay everything out on the table and be the person that did this with, you know, as textbook responsibly as I could. But the closer it got to the time when I told myself that I would leave, the more it felt wrong, the more it felt dangerous for me to think about telling him that I was going to leave. And so the night when I left, I put the divorce paperwork on the table and I packed up all my things and I left. And it was the scariest thing I've ever done. To this day, I can't imagine his, like the devastation he must've felt when he came home from work that day. I feel a lot of compassion for that. I feel a lot of heartbreak for the situation that we were both in. But I also, the new piece of information that I had then was that I didn't need to be a part of his story anymore. It wasn't safe for me anymore. Saying goodbye to that piece of my life was very hard and it was also very freeing. After I left, I spent eight months with a wonderful aunt and uncle. Creed already knows this, but that eight months was kind of like my period of what I call easy healing. 'Cause I was alone. I was very much in a situation where I could learn to feel like me again. And I needed it. It makes every experience of suffering moving forward. Something that I need to be grateful for because it would inherently bring me closer to my savior. That was a very good and very, again, easy part of my healing journey, those eight months when I was alone and living with my aunt and uncle. After that I returned to Provo to finish school while remaining in the city. And I met a wonderful young man very unexpectedly. I wasn't at all in the mindset to date. But he struck me as someone who is different. I felt safe enough to open up to him about my story. I told him about my story and he accepted it with a reverence that I have not felt from another person. He was very kind, very open and very genuine. And it was that same night when he told me that he had a relationship with pornography. He felt it was only fair like, Hey, she's trusted me with this huge piece of her life. I can't hide this anymore. Like I can't keep this from her. And hearing that from him was scary as you can imagine because on top of the emotional abuse, you know, my ex-husband and I had gone through the whole 12 step program. I had been very, very acquainted, very well acquainted with the jargon. I'd gone through that whole process. And there was significant

betrayal trauma, there was significant and kind of other factors that come from the pornography recovery world that can be very emotionally intense. And I didn't know if I was ready for that again. And I think one thing that made that experience very different was because he asked me afterwards that, you know, like, please tell me to do the hard thing cause I will like, immediately accountable. Immediately someone who knew that they had the power to overcome it. If they asked for it and if they had support. Anyway, kind of the rest is history. We went through our engagement and were married in August. And have since been doing all that we can to remain strong and choose each other every day. And a lot of communication, a lot of God's help, a lot of spiritual connection, emotional connection, kind of reworking a sexual relationship that is healthy for us. It's all been a journey and at times very difficult but also very worth it. And so I think to kind of end, there was a period of time in my dating relationship with my now spouse where I had to sit down and recognize, okay, pornography does not make someone a bad person. Having a relationship with pornography does not make someone any less, any less beautiful or virtuous kind, lovely, amazing. It's just that they've been given a mantle to carry and to overcome and to learn about Christ through. And I had to humble myself to see, Hey, this person that I love very much has a very, very independent, intense struggle that is not my right to compare it to my ex-husband's, you know, they can be on their own. They can be separate people. I can quiet my trauma voices enough to allow this person to have their space and to have their own recovery journey that is not at all colored by the one that I put so much energy into that ended up failing. And it was beautiful. You know, we're married for nine months, we're veterans now. You know, that's not it. We still work every day. But there again, I guess my ending message is that there are beautiful valiant people who are struggling and that doesn't make them any less worthy of the happiness of being, I guess married or working for something that can add to their happiness. I don't know. But it's been such a different journey and he's been incredibly accountable, kind, very open, does not take my experience of trauma healing my saying no to certain things personally. It's just, it's very clear to me that he has put forth the effort to know his divine worth. And that is not something that I could say for certain my ex-husband had done. And I think that's honestly made all the difference.

Crishelle:

I love that. Thank you so much for sharing your story. And I can just tell that you have learned a ton from these experiences and I hope you don't mind. I have a couple of follow-up questions.

Anonymous Speaker:

Go for it.

Crishelle:

How did you wake up to realize that you were in an abusive relationship? That it was no longer working for you?

Anonymous Speaker:

That's a really good question. And I wish I had more of an answer from my past self. I feel like she would be a better, more articulate person when it comes to that 'cause now I've been tainted by clinical language and can talk to you about all the hindsight that I now have. I'd say the process of kind of awakening to that truth was very gradual. And it had everything to do with listening and actually listening to and validating my experience of pain. It's not fun. It's not at all like a comfortable experience. But over time, the experience of being married to this person just got more and more painful and that little voice inside me that wanted to be heard and wanted to be seen and wanted to be acknowledged for the pain she was experiencing got louder and louder and wouldn't leave me alone. And I wouldn't necessarily say that it's something that I woke up with. It definitely took time and I feel like a lot of very...Heaven had a heavy hand in helping me recognize that it was not a healthy situation. But I feel like now that I've been out of that world for a few years now the things that I feel like are the trademarks of recognizing that a person is in an emotionally abusive relationship would be one, they have a very difficult time validating their pain. I feel like oftentimes, and this was the case for me, maybe not everyone, oftentimes emotional abuse victims are very empathic. Their empathy comes in part of a sense of love for sure, but it also develops because they've gotten so good at reading other people's emotions to avoid being hurt repeatedly. That's a survival thing. Again, this can look very different for everyone, but in my case, I had a really hard time recognizing and communicating any of my needs at all. I was functionally needless and I felt I was better and more virtuous and a

better spouse if I did not have any needs. And over time I guess I recognize that if I didn't, I didn't have any means than I wasn't vulnerable to being hurt, which is partially why I kind of adhered to that reality as well. I was getting the message that I should be needless or I guess what does the phrase that I feel most often use? I was getting the message that I should be low maintenance for my ex-spouse through various behavior and various talks that we would have. And so I clung to that because I felt like it would make me more Christlike. Like, Oh, if I can place his needs before my own, if I can completely shove everything that I need under the rug and not be selfish, then this is all gonna work out. You know, I have the, I am responsible, I am this person that can't be hurt. And all of that, it's just, it was vulnerability was very, very difficult. Because of that. I don't know if that makes sense, but the other one that kind of comes to mind was just, it's something that I mentioned before, but accountability is also a difficult, very gray area in a relationship that involves emotional abuse. And the situation that I was in, I was being told that I was the one who was responsible for my ex spouse's emotions, his sobriety. That my behavior was directly in line with his capacity to do well in school, his mental health. Oftentimes if he didn't get a certain reaction from me or receive a certain behavior from me, he would then say, Oh, well I don't have to be kind to you or I don't know. Just things like that. And then it makes the person who is in that emotionally abusive relationship feel responsible for a lot of what's going on, right? Like needing to take responsibility for your spouse's or your partner's emotional states or your spouse or partner's professional experience or school experience or anything like that. It's just, that's not a good situation. That's potentially an emotionally abusive situation. And so I feel like accountability and vulnerability are the things that were definitely grade for me in those areas. And over time I became more and more aware of that in my life. And that was partially because I sought my own therapy, partially because I was doing whatever spiritual seeking that I needed to. I had a large support system that I felt like I could connect with as well. I don't know if that answers your question, but I feel like it was a very gradual and very personal journey to becoming privy to my own pain. And it was a sacred one, one that I wouldn't ever give up or regret, but I've since had to learn that I'm not responsible for everyone's emotions around me and that being vulnerable is the scariest yet most important and beautiful thing we will ever do with the people who know how to receive that vulnerability.

Creed:

Thank you very much for that. My question for you is how did you come to feel a difference between your ex-husband and your current husband during your dating relationship with your current husband? So like you share, he opened up to you about his own pornography relationship struggle. And so can you remind us again what specifics you felt or saw in this, in your current husband that were different than your ex-husband that helped calm, or separate the two people and also calm perhaps trauma feelings that could have potentially maybe limited your ability to go into this now wonderful relationship with your now husband because if you had listened to just fears you wouldn't be in this relationship now. So how did you, how were you able to separate that and what specifics helped you notice the differences?

Anonymous Speaker:

So there's a lot more emotional connectivity with my current spouse and there was with my ex-spouse who maybe treated many things like a checklist and maybe wasn't so comfortable with the ambiguity of the experience of another person. I think that's one of them. But the main thing is what I mentioned earlier, just that my current spouse had done the work to recognize his own divine worth. I feel like it, again, it's something that you more feel for another person and what they do and what they say. But my current spouse, he was not only willing to go the distance, you know, therapy, kind of the whole nine yards to overcome whatever pornography addiction he had, I guess acquired by that point. But he was secure enough in his own sense of divine nature that he wanted a greater change for himself, not to benefit the relationship, but for himself. And that was a really important piece because I feel like that requires an understanding of a new definition of repentance. True repentance, I guess in that definition is loving yourself enough to believe that you deserve the process of creating a different experience for yourself with God's help, with the help of your loved ones. He knew that inherently, and I feel like his knowledge of who he was and where his power came from made me feel so safe because my ex-spouse made that power come from me. I didn't have to perform to get my current spouse to see that he was good to see that he was worthy. My ex-spouse, that was very much the case. I was very much responsible for his experience and his sobriety and his recovery, as I said earlier. And so, I don't know, there's definitely a set, a note of personal integrity and personal responsibility in his response to my story and then telling me that he also struggled with

pornography, which was never really present with my ex-spouse. And that's, you know, that's why I say that people can struggle with this for a very long time and they're beautiful souls who know truth about themselves. Now I think addiction, is probably the most human experience 'cause it's the brain learning something so well that in moments of distress it will turn back to that thing. And then it's our, it's our responsibility. Kind of get that under control. But yeah, he was a very much person, like you took the responsibility and had the integrity to recognize that. That he could heal his hope for himself was huge. I think another thing about my current spouse is that he's very aware of how his actions and behaviors affect me. He is very quick to say, Hey, I, I saw that thing that happened and I was thinking that it was okay in the moment and maybe it wasn't and I wanted to check like, are you okay? Or he's very open to the experience of . . . He's just aware. He's aware of me. He's aware of how his actions and behaviors affect me in a way that was maybe not present in my past relationship. He's very quick to apologize for hurt. He's very quick to recognize that something that he'd done or he had maybe done or said had triggered me or had been an experience that wasn't so kind or wasn't so helpful. And I love that about him because he's so reflective. He thinks about everything that he does. Not to the point where he's like hurting himself about like feeling a lot of anxiety about it, but it's just a part of his nature. He is very much the person who is willing to not only recognize that something that he'd done or said had an effect on me. But he's also very swift to apologize if that's something that potentially affected me negatively. Which is just a testament to his humility and his kindness and whatever he's developed over his healing journey and his development as a person. I don't know, I just, I feel very lucky to be able to see that every day. And he teaches me a lot about being a better person because he's so quick to recognize or so quick to ask himself, "Lord, is it I?" You know?

Crishelle:

I think that's so beautiful. And what I love about what you're describing is that though he is human and has weaknesses, he is striving to understand and actually be in a relationship with you. What I've noticed in these two different experiences, is that your ex-husband really struggled to see his own worth, but also your worth. Like he really struggled to see both. And whereas your husband, your current husband, he's able to see his worth and though he's not perfect, he's like working on that, right? Like we all are, which is really wonderful and beautiful and he's also able to see your worth and to be present with you and to be

present with your experience. And I think that that is really important as we are in our relationships, that we're always seeking to do that for each other. And that's going to look different depending on your personality, depending on your communication style and all those kinds of things. You're not requiring the other person to make you feel valued. You rather, you know your value. You're an independent person and you're working together to create something much greater than that. And I think that's what's so valuable about your stories is that you have seen and experienced the extremes of that. And you and you have illustrated for us and for our listeners so beautifully, this is what a true, healthy and beautiful relationship can feel like and be like. And I just want to thank you. I'm so honored to be a witness of that experience. And thank you for sharing that.

Anonymous Speaker:

Thank you.