

A SUBTLE DECEPTION

Not knowing where to turn, I called my counselor friend and said, “Cathy, Gary has been arrested for solicitation of a prostitute!”

“Sharon, Gary has a sexual addiction and needs professional help,” came her reply.

“It isn’t possible — he doesn’t even like sex!” I exclaimed. Intimacy in our bedroom had become the exception and not the rule.

Cathy assured me that it *was* possible and referred us to a professional who dealt exclusively with sexual addiction.

As I hung up, I could hardly breathe. Days before when Gary had called me from jail, I had been beyond shock. My Christian husband of 19 years, who held a good job and was home for dinner every night, had been arrested for solicitation! Nothing in my church background helped me to process that information. I wasn’t even sure I knew what sexual addiction was.

Our first visit with the counselor was eye-opening, to say the least. I discovered that “sexual anorexia” was the diagnosis for our lack of intimacy — only one symptom of sexual addiction. I learned the addiction begins with pornography and progresses with multiple forms of “acting out.”

As the fantasies had grown within Gary, he had withdrawn from our physical relationship. I had thought it was about me. I had gained weight over the years and wondered if he found me less desirable. After losing 40 pounds, Gary’s interest remained unchanged.

Intuitively I knew something was wrong; but I had no answers. As the truth unfolded now, years of odd behaviors were being explained.

Gary was exposed to pornography at the age of 8 through magazines. By age 12, he was hooked. At 15, he had his first sexual experience. Later when he became a Christian at age 17, Gary sought help from his pastor. The pastor’s response? “Fast and pray, and it will go away.”

But sexual fantasies didn’t go away, and the struggles continued to grow. Thinking marriage would eradicate the “problem,” Gary found a wife. For a while, the newness of marriage and our sexual relationship was satisfying to him. However, that proved to be short-lived, as the fantasies took over and drove him back to his former habits.

As the addiction progressed, Gary found himself frequenting strip clubs, massage parlors, and finally prostitutes — all this acted out by a man who loved God and refused to go to R-rated movies!

The arrest was a wake-up call for Gary. Although he was humiliated, his denial remained intact. His defense mechanisms had been intricately woven into the fabric of his being. He had lied not only to me, but also to himself. It was the only way to live with the shame of his “secret.”

In the following months, I found myself in a “partners’ group” with other women experiencing similar traumas. It was there I learned how to cope with the despair. Would my marriage survive this betrayal? Why hadn’t I known Gary lived a double life? Had I been exposed to a STD? What should I do now? The recovery process slowly brought answers to all those questions.

I had to work through forgiveness on many levels. Trust had been shattered, along with the foundation of our marriage. I knew that, even though we were in recovery, there were no guarantees. It took quite some time for me to thaw out emotionally and come to grips with what was happening. The shame that consumed us forced us to isolate and hide. I was afraid to tell anybody. I was sure that no one would be able to understand.

I wanted to believe Gary could just walk away from the behaviors. But I was told it would take three to five years in a 12-step program to overcome the addiction. Our recovery utilized polygraph tests as accountability; as well as therapy groups that dealt with the root issues leading to the addiction.

First Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” The strength of this addiction is formidable. Sexual addiction is like taking a cancer into one’s body. After the disease is there for a while, it grows and wraps itself around every organ in its path. When it begins to take root, those organs stop their normal functions and shut down. Just as cancer is not easily eradicated, so it is with this addiction.

Statistics say 39% of Christians struggle with this addiction. The internet has brought this issue right into our homes, causing it to be easily accessible. Pornography has been labeled a “victimless crime.” The truth is, marriages and families become the victims as men (and women) become absorbed in the addiction and disconnect emotionally and relationally from their primary partners.

Our children are also becoming exposed at early ages to the pop-ups that advertise pornography on the internet, tempting them to visit those websites. Society has become increasingly sexually explicit in movies, video games, and even television commercials. We are becoming desensitized by the continual bombardment that is ever before our eyes. Forty years ago, there was no internet, and my husband was hooked on porn by the age of 12. One might wonder where that puts our children today, with temptation so much more readily available.

Proverbs speaks often of the man that falls into sexual sin with the way leading to death. Could this particular problem be a major contribution to the present state of the Church? Ephesians 6:12 says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness...”

The best weapons we have against this darkness are in becoming educated, and praying that God’s light would shine on anything hidden in our homes. We must take up the fight against this addiction before it destroys our marriages and our children.