

# *Poems of Hope*

*By Arthur Sibanda*

## **Preface**

In March 2019 I had an impression to start an online ministry (WhatsApp) to reach out and help people struggling with sexual brokenness. I felt that this is an area that has been neglected because of the shame associated with illicit sexual activities. I have noticed how sex and nudity is now readily available online. I have spoken to several close friends of mine and a lot of youths who acknowledge with me that maintaining purity online in this present day is becoming a mammoth task.

The online ministry has helped a lot of people. I have received many testimonies from individuals who testify on how the forum has benefited them. In this volume I use poems that present a reflection of my personal experience mixed with the experiences of others I have spoken to who have struggled with sexual brokenness. I end this volume by sharing my own experience and some of the anonymous testimonies of brothers who have given me liberty to share their stories to help shed light to the world on what sexual brokenness is and give hope to those who may be struggling through some form of sexual addiction.

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Contents**

A Hospital Church .....	1
Brother Don't Turn Off That Light .....	3
Forgiven She Sang... ..	5
Just Like The Father .....	7
Let There Be Light .....	10
On Those Days.....	12
Sometimes It's Difficult.....	14
The Gift Of Going Second .....	16
The Great Physician .....	18
Today.....	21
You Will Be There.....	23
Testimonies.....	25

## **A Hospital Church**

I dream of a place of healing  
Where the weak, injured and worn out find relief  
A solace for those distraught and discouraged by their  
distress  
The struggling, the hobbling and grappling find their  
rest  
A church that heals the soul

I dream of a place of safety  
Where it's O.K. to not be O.K.  
The dark secrets, the painful experiences are related  
without fear  
A place where it's safe to open up and seek HELP  
A church that protects the weak and vulnerable

I dream of a place of restoration  
A place that is real, raw and refreshing  
Where causes are identified and treated instead of  
majoring on symptoms  
A place where life transformation occurs as every  
person is helped to overcome a 'past'  
A church that changes lives

I dream of a healing church  
A congregation of those experiencing God's healing  
grace  
Not a museum showcasing clean infallible saints  
A church which is visible and palpable  
A church which is mingling with and transforming its  
community

*'Don't stop meeting together, as some have done, but continue to encourage each other, and do so even more as you see the Day of our ultimate deliverance approaching.'* Hebrews 10:5 *The Remedy bible*

### **RELECTION**

What is the purpose of the church? I would personally think the church should be a place where people come to for healing and restoration. I would compare the church to a hospital. A place that is intentionally designed to provide the therapeutic milieu that allows people to open up about their troubles and a place where they feel safe to seek for help.

Think of your local church, what do you think needs to be done to ensure that people struggling with sexual brokenness find healing?

## **Brother don't turn off that light**

When the darkness comes I transform into a ravaging monster

Dark and base passions take control

I lose myself in gross self-centred pursuits

Click, click, and click as the urge drives me to more viewing

Secret conversations, the hidden chats and the flirting

The gruesome gnawing pains on my soul

So brother don't you turn off that light

In the darkness I morph into my nightmare and the demons are beckoned over

I break promises, forget deadlines and neglect all my duties

The beast within becomes demanding

Broken marriages, crushed hopes and neglected dreams,

As I transition from soft to hard core without restraint

So brother don't you turn off that light

The darkness is my worst and dreaded fear

As I traverse the endless cycle

Of shame, guilt then repentance and shame again

With tears, with promises and with much pleading

The endless floating and free fall into the abyss

The chaos, the pain and the sorrow

So brother don't you dare turn off that light

*'All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see they*

*are doing what God wants' John 3:20 New Living Translation*

**REFLECTION**

Have you ever been in a place where you are afraid of what you are becoming? Have you ever been in a situation where you know that when you are left all alone at night, when everyone else has gone to sleep- you would fall into your dark habit? Have you ever wished you could not fall again into your mess? Today you need to understand that part of your survival strategy is to avoid the "darkness", shun all situations that would result in you succumbing to your weakness.

What could your local church community do to help people who feel threatened by loss of self-control?

## **FORGIVEN SHE SANG...**

She sat on the ground, face bowed down in guilt and shame  
Half dressed in soiled robes, the fresh evidence of  
what she had just been doing.  
The crowd jeered, someone hurled an insult and  
another spat on her  
The opportune moment which the religious elite had  
always longed for?  
No defence, no excuse and no escape she was guilty  
as charged  
Caught in the very act of adultery her greatest fear  
had now evolved.

Moses said such should be stoned they said  
But good teacher we came to ask what your opinion  
be, they pressed  
Let the one who is blameless be first to cast the  
stone, was the response  
The young teacher stooped down and wrote on the  
sand  
The eldest read and he fled; the youngest couldn't  
stand either and followed in pursuit  
The woman and the man were left alone

Where are those who accuse you he asked?  
She peeked up in fear and said they are gone  
I don't condemn you either, go and sin no more, the  
man said  
Picking herself up, the shame and pain gone, she  
walked home in hope  
Forgiven she sang and started on a new road.

*‘Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’ John 18:10, 11 New Living Translation*

### **REFLECTION**

Many people who have battled sexual with addictions know that the greatest battle they have faced is being overwhelmed by a huge amount of guilt and shame. The individual walks around and smiles and yet inside he or she is carrying a huge burden which they wish they could find relief for. The Good News is that God is willing to forgive and heal anyone struggling with any addictive habit.

What can be done to create an environment full of forgiveness and grace in your church?

## **Just like the Father**

I was discouraged, disappointed and in despair  
Having fallen again and again in the same sinful pit  
Had tried to overcome through many attempts, but  
had failed

I sunk lower and lower into shame, pain and guilt  
Would God still love me?

I would not dare tell a friend the nature of my  
struggle

Mine was gross, lewd and much deeper than a puddle  
No one would dare imagine what I had watched,  
touched or felt

I smiled yet I was rotting inside  
Would God still listen to me?

I had heard that God hates sin

I had heard terrible stories of sinners who crossed His  
path and died

I was sure I had provoked more than His patience  
could bear

In shame, i could not dare lift up my head in prayer

Then I remembered the testimony of Jesus

‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’

I remembered how Jesus was sweet, gentle and kind

How he forgave the lame man on his bed

How he gave the woman caught in adultery another  
chance

How he could mutter on the cross in pain while they  
crucified him

‘Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they  
are doing’

Sunlight flooded into my dark closet  
The grace of God flowed in and washed out my secrets  
I saw in Jesus love, grace and forgiveness  
I knew his arms were still open wide for me  
Fear melted away as God's love took way  
Suddenly I realized, that sweet gentle Jesus was just like the Father  
Now, with boldness I now can freely appear before the throne of grace  
For Jesus has shown me how gentle the Father is

*"Jesus answered patiently, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after all I have said and done among you over these years together? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Don't you understand that I am an exact representation of the Father? So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" John 14:9 The Remedy Bible*

### **REFLECTION**

Many Christian traditions teach and present to people a picture of God (The Father) as person who is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe. God is seen as needing to have His wrath assuaged by His Son. This view makes people start to think that Jesus is the only tender and kind member of the Godhead and the Father is viewed as a tempestuous heavenly monster who needs to have Jesus close by for Him to be affectionate to us. This view makes people continue to live in fear and for this reason healing cannot occur. One way of promoting healing in those struggling with sexual addictions is to help

them have a healthier view of God's character. What can you do to ensure that a healthy view of God's character is presented in your church?

## **LET THERE BE LIGHT**

In the beginning the seed was small  
Innocent searching and curiosity  
Interest was aroused and it turned into continuous  
clicking  
The beast grew and morphed into a grotesque  
monster

The chains and pain grew quick and thick  
The tears of shame and disappointment flowed  
The cries, moans and cringing pain continued.  
There were moments of fear and terror.

What was meant to be a glimpse only for a few  
seconds with intention to just peep and immediately  
ignore...  
Became a burning urge and an incessant desire  
Which led to broken promises and broken hopes

In the beginning there was pretence and hiding  
The secret closet and the rotting skeletons  
The fake smile and the theatrical holiness  
The yearning and longing for deliverance

Then God said, "Let there be light!"  
And there was light...  
God brought the light in and He pronounced it as  
good.  
He then separated the light from the darkness...  
Infusing the light in every corner of my mind and  
heart.  
The light came and forced out the darkness and the  
secrets...

The rotting skeletons in the closet fled and disappeared  
The light melted the fear, the shame and the morbid guilt.  
The light was good, it brought peace and brought rest.

*"Then God said, "let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness." Genesis 1:3-4  
New Living Translation*

### **REFLECTION**

Secrets! There is nothing that can gnaw one's soul than having a dirty little secret hidden in one's head. "Skeletons in your closet" is an expression often used to describe this predicament.

A secret life is strenuous to live. It demands a consistent life of lies, falsehood and pretence. There is always fear of someone "finding out". Those who have experienced recovery know the importance of opening up to someone about their struggle. There is a sense of refreshing freedom to know that you have no secrets to hide because you have confessed your struggles to God and have allowed God's light to shine through into all dark corners of your life. What can be done in your local church to promote an environment which allows God's light of love to shine through the hearts of those struggling with secret sin?

## **On those days...**

On those days when I'm lonely, frustrated and sad  
On those days when I'm helpless, hopeless and in despair

On those days when I am fearful, stressful and timid  
On those days when I feel like watching, touching, or doing...

Lord be there for me and give me comfort.

On those days when I'm weak, worn out and have burnout

On those days when resisting is difficult and yet giving in is enticing

On those days when the urge and the surge is high.

On those days when the brakes fail and I slip back into the well

Lord be there to give me strength

On those days when my tears fall and my hope fails

On those days when my shame and pain scream at my face

On those days when I cannot dare kneel and pray

On those days when my pants are wet and my sin is great

Dear Lord please remember me and give me hope.

*"Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory." Psalm 50:15  
New Living Translation*

### **REFLECTION**

Recovery is a *process* hence it takes *time*. Sometimes on the journey to recovery people get discouraged because they often feel like they are going around in circles and making no significant progress. Sometimes

it feels like one is falling again and again into the same pit. We should not despair. We should be reminded that God's grace is available to us every day and every step of the way. God will be there even on those stormy dark nights. He will fight for us. What can be done in your local church to improve understanding on the nature of addictions? What recovery programs do you need to design to help those struggling with sexual brokenness? (Remember that recovery is a process...meaning it may take time for a person struggling with an addiction to come to a point of "full recovery")

## **Sometimes it's difficult**

Sometimes it seems so easy to give in than resist

There is a lot of demand for will power and resilience

It's tough...

It's a struggle to oppose what is appealing to your base nature

How do you resist what you enjoy?

How do you fight what feels natural to do?

Can you resist the urge to breath?

Sometimes it feels like a losing war, an endless cycle

You cry each time, you hate doing it yet it's difficult to stop

Its inside you, it controls you and drives you

This is drowning in a suffocating crave

The gnawing darkness that never stops

Sometimes it feels like you should give up

Just let the emotions take their toll

Stop resisting and embrace the urge

You are already soiled why not let it flow

Tired of the perpetual cycle?

Why won't the darkness leave?

*"I am frustrated with what I do! For having been restored to trust, I want to do what is in harmony with God and his methods and principles; but I find that even though I trust God, my old habits, conditioned responses, preconceived ideas and other remnants of the devastation caused by distrust and selfishness are not yet removed...What is happening is this: I have come to trust God, and I desire to do his will, but old*

*habits and conditioned responses-which present almost reflexively in certain situations- have not yet been fully eliminated and thus cause me to do things I do not want to do.” Romans 7:15, 17 The Remedy Bible*

**REFLECTION**

Old habits die hard. Our brain neural connections have been changed over a long time, it's now actually easier to indulge in the addictive habit than to resist. Saints of old knew that the struggle to overcome old habits was at times a lifelong fight. God understands the struggles we face, He is patient with us as we tread the path of healing. We should not be discouraged by moments of relapse...this is part of the recovery process. If we stick to the recovery process God will ensure that we eventually overcome our old habits.

What should be done in your church to better equip the church to help those struggling with sexual addiction?

## **The Gift of Going Second**

He opened up about his struggle and led us into his dark corner

He allowed us to see his dark past, how he'd been chained up till now

He spoke of things unimaginable, things terrifying for some to envision

You could almost hear a pin drop as everyone gasped in silence

Nobody could ever have imagined that he was such a wretch,

With darkness so palpable, frightening as lightning

Everyone continued in pause with most shocked in disgust

I stood, hugged him and smiled,

Opening up too as much as he had done.

"I too have struggled in that darkness, and have done the same as he"

My boldness broke the awkward silence

There was some acknowledgement in some faces,

Who seemed to concur too...

Another stood after me with courage and boldness as mine,

He spoke of how relieved he was, to find he wasn't struggling all alone.

The chain continued for a while and soon the whole room was embraced in grace.

The gift of going second has power to break the deafening silence

It helps everyone else to admit, that they struggle too

*“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” James 5:16  
New living Translation*

### **REFLECTION**

The biggest challenge in the church right now is the lack of openness and transparency. Christians have often subjected each other to unrealistic expectations. This leads to pretence. Christians who struggle with a weakness are often afraid to admit to others that they are struggling especially if such an admission would result in criticism, scolding and loss of sense of worth. Because of this fear people choose to hide their scars and give others the impression that they are "ok". I need to state it clear that while I believe that God has called Christians to stick to the "high road", a life of purity and holiness- however, God has not called them to live a life of false piety just like the Pharisees of old. We cannot get healed if we cannot first admit that we are struggling. When someone eventually opens up about his or her struggle it would be therapeutic to have those who have had similar issues acknowledge that they too have struggled with the same. When we are able come to a place where we recognize our common human frailties we would be in the best position to find healing. We would heal together.

## **The Great Physician**

Never make the mistake of going to a hospital and come out of it not cured.

When you are admitted, don't pretend you are well  
Don't suppress your symptoms, don't try to impress other patients by an "I'm not sick" look.

This is a hospital and not a fashion show.

Don't be embarrassed to be seen in a hospital by others...you are sick, you need HELP.

When the doctor reviews you, tell Him all and don't hide

Some issues are sensitive and private but still He has to know.

Open up your heart, empty up your secret closet and let it all come out.

The Doctor will ask to examine you, so don't be shy.

Allow Him access to every part of your soul, He has to see it all

The ugly scars, the filthy wounds and the smelly mess...all should be accessible to Him.

He can only help to the extent that you give Him access to your soul.

Never get discouraged by being sick

Some illnesses take time to heal.

Your Doctor won't judge you for being ill.

Yours is to follow the treatment plan given.

Some pills are bitter and hard to swallow but you still need to try.

The treatment plan may be painful and yet that's what makes you well.

Don't get discharged by another patient, he is sick like you also.

Don't listen to those who think their symptoms are better than yours when all of us have the same disease-sin.

You may need to understand that there is a sickness whose symptom is a person thinking they are not sick it is called lack of insight.

Concentrate on yourself, looking at others won't add an inch to your recovery.

Listen only to the doctor's instruction and never give ear to another patient's negative instruction

If you stick to your treatment plan sooner you'll get well.

You will be well enough to get discharged you will go out to tell others on how good a doctor you found.

Maybe they too will be courageous enough to admit they are ill and come to the Great Physician for healing.

*Mt 9:10-13: "Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and **other DISREPUTABLE SINNERS**. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with **SUCH SCUM?** " When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those **WHO THINKARE RIGHTEOUS**, but those **WHO KNOW THEY ARE SINNERS**.'"NLT (emphasis added)*

**REFLECTION**

What kind of man was Jesus? Modern Christianity seems to have painted a new picture of Jesus...one who is critical, judgemental and would never entertain "sinners". The Bible has a positive picture to give. Jesus loved sinners and sinners loved Him. If Jesus had come in our day and was seen hanging around with the bad elements of society, none of us modern Christians would believe in Him. Jesus demonstrated that the single most powerful force that helps "sinners" overcome their destructive lifestyles is love. Jesus mingled with them, showed them sympathy, ministered to their needs, he won their confidence and would then invite them to follow him. What needs to be done to model your local church's ministry to follow the "Jesus method" of ministry?

## **Today...**

Today, is another chance given...

To rise again

To fight again

To stand up

To rise up

To wipe away the tear

To heal the pain

To mend what's broken

To get forgiven

To try again

A fresh new start

A new fresh page

An open door

Another day!

Today, is another opportunity to...

Encourage someone

Forgive the hurt

Guide the lost

Overcome a weakness

Conquer your fears

Correct your mistakes

Achieve a new goal

Today is another day!

*"The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again. But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked." Proverbs 24:16 New Living Translation*

### **REFLECTION**

Today is the best day and time to decide to start the path of healing and recovery. Today, when you fully

understand the implications of continuing on the slippery path of addiction is the best time to act. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. Tomorrow you may not be in the same state of mind as you are today. Any other time than now may be difficult to make the necessary changes. Procrastination will impede your recovery. What can you do to help those who are struggling with sexual brokenness realise that they need to use every opportunity give to pursue healing?

## **You will be there**

You were there

When I first opened up and exposed the putrid  
wounds

The nauseas stench and the septic horrific sight  
Of dark secrets and the grotesque past

You stayed and listened

You were there

You were there

On those maddening sad nights

When I called and told you of the craving urge

When the wrathful demons were pushing me over  
the edge

You stayed and listened

You were there

You were there

When the deathly shadow was leaving

Having indulged, I was drenched in my mess

Shame, guilt and regret were glaring at me

You stayed and listened

You were there

You will be there

What a sweet and peaceful assurance

Through clouds, sunshine or rain

When tears fall, when the darkness calls or when I  
slay a demon

You will stay and listen

You will be there

*“Do what is in the best interest of each other, including sharing each other’s burdens: this is the true meaning of the law of love that emanates from the character God.” Galatians 6:2 The Remedy Bible*

### **REFLECTION**

Another vital recovery strategy is finding an *accountability partner*. This is a trustworthy person to whom you open up to about your struggle with sexual addiction. Recovery experts recognize the importance of support for a person struggling with an addiction. *You cannot overcome an addiction alone*. You need someone to help you stay on track by constantly and routinely checking on you. This person supports you with prayer and encouragement. This is the person to call when you are experiencing an urge. Talking to someone has been demonstrated to be beneficial to overcoming an addiction. What can you do in your local church to foster a culture of taking care of each other?

## TESTIMONIES

### My Testimony

I remember i talked to a former high school mate of mine. A close friend of mine... i told him i was watching porn.

I remember waiting for his reaction...i was expecting condemnation.

No he was calm, accepting and loving. He said something like "it's okay bro, God loves you!"

I didn't get it... What kind of response was that?

I really wanted this guy to scream at me, criticize me, mock me and even ask me what kind of a Christian I was to watch all that filth. No, the brother loved me and he told me God loved me.

So I would often try to tell him the sordid details of the exact things I had watch... You see I had not just watched porn, No I had watched all the terrible and horrible versions. According to my assessment I was the *Chief of porn watchers*. So i desperately tried by all means to give him the precise details.

He gave me that attitude that said "No matter what you have watched, you are my brother and God still loves you!!!"

Sometimes I would call him in the middle of watching pornography and tell him, "Bro I'm a mess, I hate myself I'm doing it AGAIN!!!" And as always his attitude and answer didn't change...he still loved me and told me God still loved me.

So I gave up trying to make this friend and God to hate me.

I started to realize that the problem was not the type of porn i was watching or the fact that I was going back to it again and again. The real issue is I was not permitting God to love me...because I didn't believe that he did.

My views about God's character were flawed. I thought of Him as an *arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving and severe celestial tyrant.*

To me God kept a detailed "list" of the types of porn I had ever watched, and He captured accurately the exact times I did it and was now furious and seething and almost about to zap me into oblivion with lightning because of my sins. I couldn't pray, I couldn't read the Bible. Yes I went to church...I smiled at people and made them think "I'm o.k." yet I felt terrible and horrible inside. I was sinking in guilt and shame.

Then this brother started to introduce a new but healing concept of God's character of LOVE. Funny though, he was using the same Bible that I had read many times before, yet somehow I had over the years painted a devil out of God's character. (That's why i was struggling to overcome porn)

Bit by bit this new picture started to develop in my mind. I started the see the "larger view" of things. God was LOVE. (1 John 4:8) and love was patient, kind, not self-seeking ...love did not keep records of wrongs, love did not give up. (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Yes NOTHING could separate me from His LOVE not even porn. (Romans 8:38-39)

The ONLY thing strong enough to separate me from His LOVE was *ME!!!*

Yes refusing to believe He loved me, would separate me from Him. Refusing to give Him permission to search my heart and find all the ugly stuff in me and bringing it out into the light for HEALING would make me continue in a vicious cycle of falling back again and again.

Yes, not cooperating with the healing process... and having a *false idea* of His *CHARACTER OF LOVE* - all that was drawing me away from Him!!!

Yes, if this continued eventually my mind would be hardened...I would be unresponsive to the pleadings of His Spirit, and at that point I would be lost.

It was not Him who would have caused it but *ME*.

Suddenly I started seeing beautiful stories of hope in the Bible...recorded for our encouragement. (David and Uriah's wife, Manasseh, Solomon Saul of Tarsus etc.) Some people had done very horrible things, yet they permitted God to heal their hearts and they recovered.

I read about how Jesus was always seen going to eat at the houses of those considered the "scum" of society yet He saw himself as the physician who would heal their hearts- and he did heal them.

*"Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such **scum**?" When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to*

*show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.'"* NLT'07 Matthew 9:10-13 (emphasis mine)

Then the message sunk in. If Jesus had lived during our time He would have hung out with me and come to my place. (*The Chief pornographer*)

This was *HEALING... the Good News*.

I then discovered that the more I dwelt and meditated on God's character *LOVE*. I lost the urge to watch porn. There was something about God's *LOVE*. It was more *fulfilling* and *satisfying* than watching pornography.

Bit by bit I gained victory. I stopped looking at myself, I started concentrating more on His *self-sacrificial LOVE*.

Yes He is not done with me yet!

I still at times feel drawn back by the lure of porn...but I strive to ignore all those urges and immerse myself in God's *LOVE*.

I know that the more i meditate on His love my neural pathways in my brain are changing and making me more and more like my loving God.

*"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* (ESV 2 Corinthians 3:18)

*"Do not continue to practice the destructive methods of selfishness, which infect the world, but be completely transformed into God's image by the renewing of your mind. Then you will value God's principles, practice his methods, and discern his will—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Rem Romans 12:2)*

**TESTIMONY "A" MALE 27:**

My struggle

I am a male aged 27. I was exposed to pornography when I was about 18 years, it all started with *soft core pornography* in movies and latter moved on *hard core porn* in friends' mobile phones. I soon learned that you can take away the urge my *masturbating*.

I hated what I was doing but when the urge came I couldn't help but give in. At 24 years I accepted Christ as my personal saviour and I thought this was the end to those evil habits but two months down the line I was unable to do away with impure thoughts, I masturbated. I felt *ashamed*, with *self hate*, low *self esteem* and *less self confident*. I loved the Lord and was so active at church, was involved in evangelistic campaigns as a witnessing team member and sometimes as a preacher. It was hard for me sometimes to participate in church because I felt unworthy.

I tried everything possible to end this but nothing worked. I tried prayer and fasting, responded to calls by preachers and tried New Year resolutions which seemed to work for a few months but I would be back again.

Last year I joined the group ***pure heart fighters movement*** and I'm still a fighter. I'm not yet fully recovered because I sometimes yield, but I will never give up fighting because of encouraging books and articles.(and the assurance that I now have that I'm not the only one having these issues in the group- I'm not alone)

I now believe by letting you know, that I have moved gear 1 which is more labour intensive. It is my first time to share this with anyone.

**Testimony “B” Male 27 years:**

Porn was a common feature on video halls every Sunday night. Though I was familiar with kind of movies screened on those nights, I was still under the age permitted to watch so I continued to be curious and wish to be able to watch the adult videos.

I grew up at a time when health workers would teach us about the dangers of getting H.I.V/A.I.D.S so I stayed abstinent until I was about 22 years. Sadly however I got sexually involved with a girl I fell in love with when I was in form six. After my sexual debut my hunger for sexually stimulating material increased. The real battle with pornography started when I enrolled at university when I had more access to the internet and would browse and search for porn on my laptop and cell phone. All of a sudden I lost control of my habit and would often find myself downloading nude pictures and video from social media platforms despite the fact that I always raised complaints to those people who sent such materials on those platforms. However with time the habit took control of me and I searched and watched more. As this trend

continued I would often feel guilty and empty after watching. I was very careful to clear my browsing history both on my phone and laptop to avoid being caught by fellow friends most of whom were church members.

My struggle continued anonymously in cycles of abstaining and watching going on and on. For those times when I managed to stay off porn I found that my mind remained filled with pornographic images and hence I would get triggered went through pop-up adverts whenever I was online leading me to fall again into watching. This cycle introduced me to masturbation a practice that I used to satisfy the sexual crave I was getting from pornography. All this did not leave me unscathed. Soon I started to experience the dire effects of my actions the most worrisome was erectile dysfunction. This scared me to the core since I was a young man who was expecting to marry soon.

I also realized that the habit was now overpowering as I found myself watching porn on days when I was attending church services (on Sabbath), this was my lowest point. However, I started experiencing real progress when I opened up about my struggles to close friends (like the author) and trying to find resources and materials that address pornography addiction. I would personally think pornography should be taken seriously in God's church because many people struggle with it and don't know how to fight it.

### **Testimony "C" Male 29years**

My struggle with pornography began when I was 10 years. I live in a country where pornography is legal

hence I first encountered it on cable TV where soft core porn was readily available. Soon I started to look for more dramatic and grotesque stuff and ended up addicted to watching it. This has been a difficult journey of about twenty years of struggling with addiction.

This was a horrific experience that traumatised me in many ways. I found that my mind was constantly filled with images I had watched and I felt like a “zombie” like my mind had changed and another person was living in my mind making me think the horrible thoughts I was having. I found myself having challenges in the relationships I was having. This whole experience affected my spiritual life. I often felt like God was angry at me for the stuff I had watched. I am now on a painful path of recovery yet I know how I have been scarred by this. I know how easy for me to go back to watching again. I would advise anyone watching such stuff to seek help as early as possible.

**Testimony “D” MALE 31:**

This was a difficult issue to write down because it’s a struggle that has hurt me a lot and dragged me through a lot of guilt and shame.

I started watching pornography when I was at college I was 23years by then. For some queer reason I was drawn to *gay porn (homosexual)*. It was something that scares me at first yet I found myself enjoying watching it until into my head and I would have sexual mental images wherever I saw handsome guys. This interest in men led me to search for friendships with men online (WhatsApp and Facebook). Sadly I

fell into the temptation of experimenting homosexual sexual relationships. It is a sad and difficult issue for me to think of the stuff I have done with other men. This was a very difficult experience to go through given that I am a member of a conservative church denomination a person you could hardly suspect to have done any gay sex act. I got to a point where I started to feel dirty and terrible, my spiritual life died... I thought God no longer listened or recognized me, it was terrible.

When I was sinking in my sexual habits God made a way out for me. I got the WhatsApp group link for **PURE HEARTS FIGHTERS MOVEMENT** in one church WhatsApp chat group and I joined. I have been blessed by this ministry from the time I joined it. I'm still recovering and definitely the Devil will continue to lure me back to the paths of darkness. It's sad to say that I still get texts via inbox and people try to sexy and seduce me, by God's grace I have been resisting (members from church WhatsApp chat groups). Even in a place of recovery the Devil will send his agents to tempt those who are trying to walk on the path of repentance.

I am not discouraged. I will continue to fight.

Lastly I want to speak to a person who may be struggling with same sex feelings. We need to be careful what we watch. My path of struggling began through curiosity- watching homosexual pornography. From watching I proceeded on to act what I had been watching. Pornography is dangerous. I also want to make an appeal to the church to start ministries like PURE HEARTS to reach out to people struggling with sexual addictions. People with same sex issues will not come out into the open to seek for

help because most of the church members condemn and shun such people. This is considered the worst sin than other sins. This attitude makes it difficult for someone looking for help to be assisted because once they open up they will be treated worse than animals. Continue to pray for me and for people like me.

**Testimony “E” Male 19years**

I remember the day clearly, it was after work. I went home straight away. Because I came unexpected I found my sibling watching hard-core pornography. I was so furious at him and I took the hard drive away and slowly slid it in my pocket and told him not to watch such stuff in my house. I immediately left the room and went to my bedroom where I struggled to get some sleep just to ease my body aches after having had a long hectic day.

My relationship with “Gina” was in a critical state, we were on the verge of separation. After a quick sleep my cell phone had eight missed calls from Gina and a text saying “I can’t take this anymore”. My brains were scattered all over the place I sat on my desktop, scratched my head in anxiety and agitation. I reached out to my pocket and found the hard drive, a thought rang in a silent voice “plug it in and just browse through, it won’t hurt” I did not hesitate to plug in.

I was in distress and pain, I wanted an escape-something to soothe my misery and I was lead to binge on the porn I had earlier loathed. I was shocked by what I saw, my heart paced and I was sweaty. I felt a rush and strong urge to watch all the videos. I got hooked. I started watching them and the more. Every day I would make sure got a new and more dramatic hard-core porn movie. I struggled with

this for quite a while. It was like I had planted a small tree and the roots were getting bigger and going deeper. I could not sleep without spending at least three hours watching pornography and it was becoming more and more difficult to stop watching.

Pornography became my medication, my place to find peace. However it also messed up my mind, it taught me to objectify women and see them as tools to be used for my personal pleasure. A close friend noticed my struggles and asked me to join a recovery group on WhatsApp, a group where people were assisted to try to fight the same battles I faced. Recovery was not a simple feat. I failed more than ten times; the group members helped me to regain myself in every step of the battle. They always stood by me and helped me overcome the fight. It took me time to heal. As often said it always rains before the rainbow, after a long struggle in the dark I ended up seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. No matter how many times I failed I always got up and kept on fighting. I lost a lot due to my addiction but I regained my value after the struggle. I broke the chain and became a champion.

**Testimony “F” Male 35:**

I can't remember when I started with porn but it was at an early age. I would hear my brother talking about porn with friends and I became curious. So I began the journey of pornography use. This interest in porn soon led to an addiction to masturbation. We would gather up with friends and watch hard core porn videos. We used to call it the "*world cup*" to disguise it from others. We sought more opportunities to watch it and this to me led to heavy masturbation, which resulted in me getting depressed as I noticed how hard it was to stop.

By the time I was 16 I was so much into it that every time I was alone or bathing I could not resist the temptation to masturbate. Eventually this leads me to seek physical sexual intimacy at an early age sadly with many sex partners. Even when I became sexually active I couldn't stop masturbating. I carried porn watching and masturbation into my marriage. Soon I realised that it was now affecting my marriage. So I decided to stop watching porn and it helped my marriage a lot yet the masturbation didn't stop right away. Eventually I stopped after a heavy struggle. This entire painful journey started with watching porn. And I am convinced it's an addiction just like drugs or any addictive bad habits which need rehabilitation and God's grace. Importantly we need to admit the weakness then try to deal with it. I believe prayer really helped me in my fight with this addiction.

### **How pornography affected my spiritual life (Testimony “F” Continued...)**

The worst part about porn and masturbation is that it drains the spiritual life out of you. I was born and raised in a conservative protestant church which adheres to very high ideals and moral standards. This struggle caused a lot of psychological trauma in me. I constantly felt like I was no longer worthy to go before God and be accepted hence I stopped praying. At that one time at an early age I was an elder at church and I recall that I couldn't devote myself totally to my church duties because of the guilt and shame. I knew I had rotting skeletons in my closet which no-one knew about. I just felt so separated from God that I got very hopeless. Thank God for his mercy as there was a voice in my head that continually encouraged me to give myself to God.

There is a brother who helped in my recovery; he used to send spiritually stuff on our WhatsApp and Facebook groups about the dangers of porn and masturbation and how God loves us very much even though we have baggage. Gradually my relationship with God was restored; though I have not totally healed I am still being restored

Arthur Sibanda is a Seventh day Adventist Christian and a mental health nurse based in Victoria Falls Zimbabwe who is passionate about helping people overcome sexual brokenness. He is running a ministry online WhatsApp and has been invited to make presentations to youths and other interest groups who may be struggling with sexual brokenness. He has also done other presentations that reveal how a good perception of God's character is healthy for mental health and spiritual life.

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