

LEADING SAINTS

Addressing Female Pornography Use in Relief Society | An Interview with a Former YSA Relief Society Presidency

August 25, 2019

Kurt: Today I am in a dentist's office, of all places, again for an interview. Thanks to President Ferrell for lining this up. This is his office. But I am going to chat with four fantastic women. Let's just have you introduce yourselves briefly to put you into context. We'll start with Whitney because you were the Relief Society president of the stake that we're referencing.

Whitney: My name is Whitney Woodruff. It's been a couple of years since this all took place, but I had the opportunity to serve as a Stake Relief Society President. And I will never forget the day I was extended the call from President Ferrell and the overwhelming...He had I guess a little background. He had forewarned me that a couple of months before. I was serving as a Ward Relief president and he had put me in a PPI and we were talking, and it said, "What are your thoughts about this idea?" And I was like, whoever that happens to, I feel sorry about." Little behold that I didn't know what was coming my way. But it was a humbling experience because you get to serve with amazing women and priesthood leaders. I currently just graduated with my doctorate degree. So I work as a nurse practitioner and have loved the gospel and experiences I've had serving Relief Society.

Kurt: All right. Stacie.

Stacie: Awesome. Well, my name is Stacie Leavitt, which most of these people don't know me as because I was Stacie Karter back in those days. I got married. I've been married for about two years. I live in Roy and I work there as a high school math teacher, and also coach track and field. That's what I'm up to.

Kurt: Awesome. Kaylyn.

Kaylyn: I'm Kaylyn Crawford. I'm from West Point, Utah. I currently live in Orange County, California. I relocated there about four months ago for a job. I do interior design. And I'm loving California life.

Kurt: I bet. I bet. Kimberly. I'm Kimberly Webb. I was a gardener when I served in the presidency. I lived in Clearfield at the time, now I live in Clinton, Utah with my husband and my one-year-old son.

Kurt: Awesome. Whitney, maybe let's go back to you. You talked a little bit about the backstory. I think a lot of this was in a Young Single Adult stake where you all served as the Stake Relief Society presidency. I think from my experience with Young Single Adult stakes, oftentimes the Stake Relief Society presidency are generally older serving women who are oftentimes spouses to maybe High Council, bishops or other leadership within the stake. So how did this come to be that they pulled from the Young Single Adult body to build the Relief Society presidency?

Whitney: Rob, you can help us out a little bit because he has that backside story. But I know for me, it had been a topic of discussion in PPI's with him, and then with my bishop of "This is a great opportunity for you to learn, and you're the same age, so you're familiar with what sisters are going through. It's an opportunity to address those if you're willing to." I had talked with Rob about some of that. Like I had mentioned previously, I think it was in February of 2015. Is that the year we were called?

Kaylyn: Yes.

Whitney: I don't remember. I'm pretty sure it was 2015. I was in PPI and he had mentioned like, "Hey, I've thought of this, I don't know if this will come to pass, but what do you think of this being an opportunity?" And I just remember being a little shocked that that was even an option as a young single adult because I guess in my mind, I'd always thought that would be somebody that had more experienced than somebody our age.

I kind of played with the idea over a few months. And it maybe it was the Spirit working on me, like, "Hey, some changes are coming," but I actually wasn't called till August. So I had a few months to stew over the idea and think of like, "Okay, what if that ever came about? Or how would you fulfill that calling as a young single adult?" I don't know.

I actually was in a different unique situation with him, and he pulled me aside at the institute building in Ogden and called me to be a Stake Relief Society president. And I'm pretty sure my jaw dropped and I didn't feel adequate enough, definitely with the experience, and honestly left in tears and felt like I was going to fall to the floor just because it seemed overwhelming. But it's amazing how the Spirit and the Lord strengthen you through that time.

Kurt: And how long did you all serve together?

Stacie: I think it was only about nine months.

Whitney: Just under a year.

Stacie: Just under a year, yeah.

Whitney: Yeah, it was just under a year.

Kurt: Great. I'm sure there's a variety of things you did during that time which probably are worth talking about. But I want to really zoom in and focus on when I was interviewing President Ferrell and he mentioned that he had a Stake Relief Society presidency that really effectively address the concept of pornography in the Relief Society setting. And it wasn't a lesson about, you know, how to help your boyfriend avoid pornography or the other men in your life. This was in the context of how do you as sisters in the Relief Society approach and understand this issue of pornography, [00:05:00] sexuality in general, right? I mean, it's all just together. So where did this idea come from or where did the inspiration start for this?

Stacie: Well, I'll start a little bit there. There's a lot of different factors. We were talking about this last week, and all of us have a bit of a different insight as to what started it for us individually. For me, about a couple months into serving as the presidency, we had a Stake Conference where a member of the Seventy - he was a member of the Seventy, right? Pretty sure - came and we were able to have lunch with all the bishops and their wives and President Ferrell and this Seventy and his wife.

The Seventy was allowing all the bishops to bring up one question, and one concern and it kind of seemed like bishop after bishop brought up this issue of pornography. They were most, if I remember correctly, mostly focused on how it affected the young men in their wards. But I remember their wives mentioning that they were concerned about the sisters in their wards for multiple reasons.

One of the bishops stated that they thought over 90% of the men in their ward struggled with pornography. That blew me away because I had never thought about it before. I have never been taught very well as to what it really wasn't how much it affected. I was living in a bubble, so to speak, and they punctured that bubble very effectively that day. That is kind of what started it for me of lighting fire of I needed to learn more about it, and I wanted to learn more about it. Then we started discussing how it affected the sisters more after that meeting that day.

Kurt: And then, when you started discussing as a presidency how it affected the sisters, what points came to the surface as far as things that maybe you thought and had an impression inside that it wasn't till you maybe voiced it they thought, and everybody sort of nod their heads like, "Yeah, I agree." Anything come to mind?

Kimberly: I remember we were having a presidency meeting because we've been given the assignment to teach Relief Society during Ward Conference. So to go to every ward in the stake and teach the lesson. And we wanted to teach the same thing. So we were mulling over ideas, what do we want to talk about. And this was one of the things.

I remember that we all got really passionate about it, because of different reasons, because of different personal experiences that we had had. But the points that we, I think, brought up that we needed to talk about were defining what pornography is, and recognizing that it's an everybody problem, and not just a man's problem, and not just hiding in your secret closet in your house in the middle of the night problem, nut a driving down the freeway problem. It's

everywhere. So defining it, defining masturbation, which is never talked about, and talking about overcoming through repentance and the use of the Atonement of the Savior.

Kurt: Nice. Anybody would add to that or that or does that sum it up?

Kaylyn: I think as we kind of had this, as we kind of recapped, we kind of went to the root of why we are I guess picking a topic and what was our end goal. Whitney can speak to this a lot, but it was, "our sisters need to be in the temple. Okay, so let's backtrack, what's keeping them out? That's, you know, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, sins that are holding them back, things like that." That was kind of like beginning conversations that then led to this, like, wow, this is a big problem that we're not addressing, and we could possibly speak to this, you know, when we all got super passionate and excited about the topic and was like, "Oh, this is it."

Kurt: Then was it from there you came to you thought, this should be the focus of our Ward Conference topic?

Whitney: I would say it took a few meetings, I think, as we took it home and studied and prayed and sought out inspiration and revelation. And then we came back and we'd say, "Well, what about this? And what about that?" Like Kaylyn mentioned, I think it did go, "We had to have the bigger vision. What was the purpose of this?"

Really, we had received counseling from the stake presidency to help sisters be in the temple. At that point, it had been a new thing too, you know, you don't have to be married or going on a mission to receive your endowment. For me, that was invigorating because I had served a mission and had been in the temple and had a testimony of it, but I love the temple, and I wanted all sisters to be there. So I think as we kept that vision in mind, and then we started building, things just kept coming. And it was cool to see how it just flowed together. It took some time and a few weeks for that to happen, but it resolved and came together.

Stacie: I think as well because when you talk about the [00:10:00] issue of pornography, there really is so much that you can talk about. I remember we would go over all these different aspects from when you're dating someone who struggles with it to family using it and different things like that. But as we talked about it, I think we really...I mean, we didn't want to come in halfway through the issue, because we really looked at so many don't even know the basic definition. So many don't know these basic facts, and that it does apply to sisters. And so we had to kind of attack the problem right at the beginning, right at the source rather than...I mean, we could have spent months and months going through different lessons of different issues that pornography affects, but we just really kind of hit the starter points.

Kurt: I want to ask you just about the logistics of how you approached it, and then we're going to get into the principles about pornography in the context of the Relief Society. So this was a Ward Conference, Relief Society hour lesson that you did. Did it look like just a typical lesson? Did you all participate? Were there visuals? I mean, how did you approach it the most effectively with that way?

Kimberly: As I recall, at the beginning of the lesson to introduce it, we all stood up together to introduce it. Then we each took a topic, and then the rest of us would sit down with one person taught, and then just flow into the next one.

Kurt: And did they know that this was the topic before they walk in there?

Kimberly: I don't think so.

Whitney: No, it was a surprise.

Kimberly: Unless they heard from the other wards that that's what we're doing. And we did tell the Relief Society President that that was going to be a lesson.

Kurt: So you sort of introduce it together, everybody took a part, and it was about 40-ish, 45 minutes. Anything after that? Did you revisit it? Or how did you keep the discussion going? Was there anything implemented in that way or...?

Stacie: I think that we were unable to as a presidency do that too much because our time together wasn't extremely long. But I think that's where we kind of transferred a little bit more to that ward's Relief Society President if okay. We've kind of done the starter where you need to keep the baton going if we would pass the baton to them.

Kaylyn: In addition to that, towards the tail end of the lesson, we had President Ferrell come up, and he would do his portion of it essentially. He typically would bring up the Relief Society President of the ward and just like bring her in close, and just say like, "Hey, sisters, this girl is on your team, and she wants to be there for you, and she's shown that you can turn to if you're not ready to go to your bishop." That was part of that passing on the baton of like, "Yeah, we can't be there all the time to teach this or to facilitate this, but like, here's someone that can. This is your leader, and she's a great asset to you."

Kurt: I just love this model that regardless of what you said, which I'm sure was fantastic stuff, giving permission to the Relief Society body to talk about this subject, because we had our leaders come in, and they talked about it, so this is okay to talk about. I mean, that alone is going to be huge, right? Then the permission that President Ferrell gave, as far as, you don't have to run to your bishop who you're maybe not comfortable with to talk about this subject with somebody, talk to your sisters, talk to your Relief Society president and just start somewhere because we're here wanting to help, right?

Together: Yeah.

Dr. Ferrell. I mean, how many doors do you think that opened with the ward Relief Society presidents can take in that charge?

Kimberly: I would say that it opened a lot of doors. I know, for me personally, the experience I've had with pornography usage, and masturbation, and even addiction, if someone was to come to

my Relief Society and give me that permission slip and be like, "Hey, this is okay, and let's open up this conversation," I know for me personally, it would have really opened up that door.

And I feel like we got commentary back from whether it was a Relief Society presidents or individual sisters that said, "Hey, that helped me to feel comfortable, and that helped me to take a step in the direction of my Savior." I think that it opened up a lot of doors. I know for me personally, it opened up doors, or even just like opened my mind up to this new idea of I can turn to my Relief Society President if I'm not quite ready to go to a bishop.

Kurt: Really, when we don't talk about these things, we have sort of fertile ground for that shame to continue to build. Because I'm sure if there's an individual, there may be several that really struggle with masturbation or with pornography, they think, "I'm the only sister in the Relief Society because this isn't a girl problem." And that just simulate shame. But when you open that door, then more conversations happen, right? [00:15:00]

As far as just feedback in general, then we'll get into these principles, but what feedback after the result did you get? You mentioned as far as maybe more conversations about it.

Stacie: I remember, actually, some of the bishops who they would either sit in or they would just hear by word of mouth, they were like, "Can you teach the brethren about it too?" And I'm like, "Well, let's just hold on and stay with the sisters for a minute." But I mean, the bishops were so excited that we were breaching the topic. I remember them being very excited about it.

Dr. Ferrell: Speak too because there were a lot of senior adult sister adult leaders, that were in those classes. What was the reaction you had from the senior sister adult leaders?

Stacie: I think they were surprised by our frankness, but they were very pleased by it as well. I think some of them, if I remember correctly, went and said, "I've never been in a class like this. In my, however many years in the church, I've never had a class..."

Dr. Ferrell: [inaudible 00:16:03] sisters?

Stacie: Yeah, speaking so frankly of pornography, and masturbation and this issue.

Kurt: Any other feedback that comes to mind that we're missing?

Whitney: I feel like since this has all taken place and it's been a while, is just how I've been able to handle it more what it not only taught myself but just to be able to approach that more with friends or in conversations, and now serving with Young Women having the understanding of how do I help them understand that younger, and not be afraid to be open about it. Because I think like you had mentioned, that whole shame thing, I think it starts with guilt. We don't know. And sometimes you don't know that you're doing something wrong till you've learned about it. But then the guilt comes, and then we hide it and we bury it. And not only does that impact the shame game, I think it impacts and it snowballs effect into other issues. But I don't know, for me, it's led to a lot of different conversations and being able to help people now, not just that one time.

Kimberly: Then there's the effect that we may never know if we taught a sister what it is. And so next time she goes to the library and picks up a book that has a bad scene in it, she can recognize right away what it is instead of wondering, "Is this on the line? Is this something I should read?" And just to have been taught that from the time she was 21, or 19, or 18, for a lot of those young single adults, to just have that definition of, "Hey, and here's resources, and here's people you can talk to, and you don't have to be so ashamed." And we'll never know those stories because maybe they didn't happen.

Kurt: Yeah, that was great.

Whitney: I'll be honest, I think one of the big things I've noticed too is, my dad was serving the bishopric, and I remember as we were studying this topic, they would be like, "What are you studying to teach?" And I told them, and literally, both my parents' faces were priceless. But I think just having a thought of like, "Wow, I'm surprised the sisters are willing to go teach that."

Seeing how they were interested and intrigued, because, you know, in their generation, they did not learn that growing up. And so I've seen the change even within my own family of being able to be more open. It's a touchy subject, and they listen sometimes to your dad say that as a female is kind of like, "Yeah." It's kind of weird, but it's been able to be empowering I think to not only the sisters. But I hope in their future families this is something they will teach and share with their kids younger and be able to have those open conversations.

Kaylyn: Not to harp on this too much, but I feel impressed to share that this has kind of come about again as like President Ferrell reached out to us and was like, "Hey, we'd like to do this and include you guys," it's kind of come full circle to me, I feel like. Because this was about four years ago about when we were serving together.

But at that point in my life, I was three years into my own recovery, and I never really shared that with anyone. I had shared that with a few friends and bishops. For me, it was a liberating experience of like, "We're teaching this. We're going to start to open up these doors." I just feel like now that that's four years, and now I'm seven years into recovery, it's really interesting to see what impact that time in my life with these sisters and with President Ferrell did for me, and the progress that's been made in the last four years, or even just in the last year of being more willing to talk about it in a state of I have struggled with this.

Because before, even when we went and taught, it wasn't "this is my experience." We were talking about it from a very accumulative standpoint of not sharing personal experiences. But in my personal life, it had helped [00:20:00] me and propelled me to share it more personally with relationships that I have, friendships and with my family even now. Whereas four years ago, I never even dreamed of doing that because it was just something that I only talked to you about with my closest friends that knew me very, very well and trusted bishops.

So to see and to reflect on that just the last few weeks - as this has come about again, and we've been talking about it more - has been really great for me to kind of feel like, "Wow, I didn't realize it at the time but that was impacting me to be where I'm at now four years later."

Kurt: I would imagine like these personal stories, you didn't address it as "we hear there's this problem out there somewhere," but to say like, "This is this impacts all of us. This is a problem amongst us all." Because when it's out there away from us, then people think, "Well, I'm out there away from people, I am in this room," right? So really personalizing it, and sharing your story, I mean, that brings power though it's a vulnerable spot.

Kaylyn: Yeah.

Kurt: Anything as far as the logistics, the approach, how you handled it that should be mentioned before we dive in here?

Stacie: One of the main things we did is I think we, of course, started out talking about hope in the atonement, but then right off the bat, we really felt the need to define it. Because it would have been an awful lesson if about three-fourths of the way through we are like, "Oh, by the way, let's actually talk about what pornography is." Because otherwise, I mean, it would have just been too vague to just blurry people really not understanding what we mean, which I think is how most lessons on pornography go is just not being upfront and direct about it. So we would start with that.

Dr. Ferrell: Do you remember what that definition was?

Stacie: I have it, surely. Surely do. This is from the church. They're gospel topics, which is a fairly recent thing that they've been putting out. And they define it as pornography is any depiction in pictures or writing that is intended to inappropriately arouse sexual feelings. That is the basic one. What was interesting is, last night I was curious about this, I went and I looked up what the definition of pornography is in other dictionaries that's not church or religious at all.

Both Merriam Webster, the Google Dictionary, Britannica, so many others, almost word for word, the same. And they all use that word "intend" or intent. So that it is intended to inappropriately arouse sexual feelings. Gospel topics goes on to say it may be found in written material, including romance novels, photographs, movies, electronic images, video games, social media posts, phone apps, erotic telephone conversations, music, or any other medium. Which I just love. I love that the church has come out and now is stating all these different ways. Because if you look at some of their older definitions, they see a few ways of you know what was happening at the time. But now, I mean, it's including social media posts and apps. I mean, how many apps are there to communicate with pictures that can instantly be taken down, but not a good road, and including romance novels, as well, saying that.

Kurt: I love this approach that you sort of walk into this lesson assuming nothing, right, that everybody sort of knows what pornography is. But really starting there with the definitions. And frankness is crucial in this. You can't beat around the bush or allude to certain things. I mean, you had to be quite direct in this lesson, right?

Stacie: I think as well, for me, this is the part that I get most passionate about. Because I was definitely the epitome of a sister who grew up in a bubble who had no idea what pornography was. I'll share a little story that kind of as I look back now is one of the biggest things I regret.

It was before my mission, and a guy I was dating at the time came forward to me and he brought up the conversation admitting to struggles with pornography. I only share this to show just how little I knew. He comes forward, he says this, and the first words out of my mouth, I said, "Please don't hurt me." Because that was the image in my head. I mean, I was 18 years old, never really been defined as to what pornography is, or anything about it. [00:25:04] It was just pornography, evil, run. I had this image in my head that I was going to be hurt by a great young man who, I mean, just is outstanding, who was just admitting to me that he had struggled in the past, and that was my first response. So that I think is where my fire came off, we need to know specifically what this is. We need to understand this in all of its mediums because there's a lot to that.

Kurt: Any other principles or points kind of my as far as how you laid the groundwork? Obviously, being straightforward, defining some terms. Anything else you did to sort of launch into the lesson?

Whitney: We used The Strength of Youth pamphlet. And I remember setting that you, you know, it had been a few years since I had as a youth, but I remember reading that and how simple it was. It tied right in with the definitions we were reading. But it was a good review because I think you're in Young Woman's, Young Men's and then you graduate, and sometimes we forget that resource. So we used that as well to help define what we were talking about.

Kurt: Awesome. Tell us about, in your preparation for this, how did you start to build the outline to this? Was it mainly using resources like The Strength of Youth? What were the main points that you used there?

Kaylyn: I would say, from my memory, I think we were meeting every week at this point. Basically, we would go our separate ways, we would find as much information resources that we possibly could, kind of pull out what we felt like was most important, and then come back together and really dive into those things and pull it apart even more. What do we really want to share, at what point do we want to get crossed, and what should the flow be? I think that it was a lot of resources, and then personal experiences, which we didn't share too many "I" things within I guess the actual lesson. Then from there, really piecing it together.

We had quotes, we had manuals, we had different things to kind of help us and aid us as we went through the topic. Also a lot of prayers. I remember a lot of prayer going in personally about how can we possibly talk about this topic to a group of our peers that probably haven't heard too much about this, and especially haven't heard it from an angle of "what do you do if you're struggling with this?" Not an angle of like, "What if your boyfriend is struggling with this?" I think it was a really new approach that I definitely wanted to kind of I guess present with ease and in a kind way.

Stacie: We had backup, which was President Ferrell.

Kurt: When you say backup, like leaders in the room?

Stacie: Yeah. One of the main reasons why we would make sure President Ferrell was there for every single one is he had a way of reining the sisters in. Because I remember I believe it was our first lesson, so our first time up and going, and we want the focus to be on how pornography affects the sisters. And close to the start, we had a wonderful sister in the back of the room try and skew it to the left talking about her boyfriend or something like that. And it's...

Kurt: Like how it affects you in a relationship with a boyfriend?

Stacie: Yes. And dear President Ferrell, I mean, we didn't even have to say anything. His hand was not even up. He was speaking and just pulling it back in and saying "No, we need to focus on how this affects us. It's not it affects 30% of women or it affects 50% of women. It affects all of us." He was there to kind of help rein it in, which was great. We definitely needed that support as well.

Kurt: I love that. Because I can imagine especially being a former bishop, when something like this happens and like, "All right, I'm going to close the door. You ladies have your talk. I'm going to be out here, I'll deadbolt, make sure nobody escapes." But to have him in the room present and even maybe times raising his hands and sort of helping you veer the conversation back to the main mission and focus of it, right?

Stacie: It was an essential part, for me at least.

Kurt: I'm glad you mentioned that. That's good. Any other as far as laying the foundation of defining terms, being frank upfront? Any other points other than the great definitions you shared that you hit on?

Stacie: Well, we would - and [00:30:01] this is where we shocked quite a few people, not in a bad way, I don't think

Kurt: But it was like, "Well, this is a different lesson."

Stacie: Yeah. Because we would define masturbation as well, which not many people knew what that was. But...

Kurt: Where does one go for a definition of masturbation you would share in a Relief Society room?

Stacie: Actually, I searched the church website for quite some time. I couldn't find one. So you do have to go online, but it's hard because even online, every single one I was reading was geared towards men.

Kimberly: I thought there was a definition in True to the Faith.

Stacie: There might be. I might have missed that.

Dr. Ferrell: But it is very brief.

Kaylyn: Brief.

Whitney: Yeah, they have a brief one.

Kaylyn: Brief.

Whitney: Very brief.

Kurt: And that was your experience with masturbation as a youth that any explanation you got was brief and kind of vague, right?

Stacie: Yeah. Well, and my thing is, is that I don't think we recognize that it can look different for women. Because women are very emotional, imaginative people. We don't necessarily need visuals. We don't necessarily need the same form of contact for our minds to take us to a place that can include masturbation. Because masturbation is a stimulation of yourself for sexual pleasure.

Kurt: And not just a physical stimulation?

Stacie: Not necessarily. No, not for women. I think women are a lot more along the lines of imaginative, fantasizing things like that, that I think that's why a lot of people struggle to say masturbation can even be possible for women because they think, "Oh, it has to be contact. It has to be touching." Not necessarily. Are we going to rule it out for a man? No. Definitely does include those points as well. But I think that's another aspect that doesn't get looked at very closely.

Kurt: So you have these general definitions in place. Where did you move from that point? And not that I'm sort of trying to move through just it. I want to know the main point you hit on throughout this that you felt like these are really crucial for the sisters understand.

Kaylyn: From the definitions, did we go to...?

Kurt: And maybe [inaudible 00:32:25]

Kaylyn: Briefly review this. But was it to the negative side effects? Was that [inaudible 00:32:33] I believe.

Whitney: Being in medicine, I'm really fascinated about how the body works. But I also more fascinated how the spirit and the body work together. We had talked about that. One of the things I had talked about was your thoughts, whether they were your imaginations, or you're reading something, or you're watching something, they lead and arouse emotions. And I think as women, we kind of establish that, that that kind of happens. Are we aware of our emotions? I'll be honest, I remember like, hey, how would you define anger to somebody? And I'm like, "I don't know." Can we really acknowledge when emotions were feeling or whatnot?

So I kind of went through this process of what chemical releasing...It was kind of like a brief anatomy lesson, and I guess you could say of what happens in the brain with different things. And I had walked through that. But really some of it was your thoughts are going to lead to your emotions. They're going to trigger some sort of emotions. And when that happens, what actions are going to come because of those emotions? Are you actually going to arouse yourself? Are you going to find yourself in situations trying to feed those thoughts and emotions more? And then really your results. Because results are going to be your habits. If you're doing this over time, and not fulfilling those emotions or addressing them, at a certain point, you're going to have these habits or potentially these dependencies that arise in your life, and then, before you know it, how do you get out of it?

So we kind of went through that and just addressed what it really does to you. I think having that understanding of really what it does to you physically, it was like, "Oh, wow, like, I didn't realize the impact of how this really combines and connects."

Kurt: Because there are practical reasons that individuals turn to various habits or addictions or masturbation that there's a numbing effect to it. Right? Chemicals are released and it's a way to escape for a minute. But we then define ourselves that, is just something wrong with me out there. Why do I want to do this? That I would imagine helps remove the shame of these discussions of saying like, "There's a completely logical, biological reason that we turn to this."

Stacie: And we made sure, as she would start this, I remember you being very specific of saying, "By the way, these emotions, these feelings are not bad." Because we didn't want sisters to be like, "Oh, no, I'm feeling love or happiness," or any start of attraction towards the opposite sex and be like, "That's bad." We don't want them to shut that down. No, that's good. That's part of God's plan.

We just wanted to make sure that they understood when it's not directed the way it should be [00:35:00] is where issues start coming in. Because I think that happens a lot as we talk so much, as well as just abstinence, stay away, only kind of do one viewpoint of the law of chastity. And then some people feel bad for even being attracted to someone of the opposite sex. We should never go that far in our lessons.

I started dating my husband right as this whole thing started. Now, mind you, I had never brought up the subject of pornography to anyone I had ever dated before, which also concerned me because I was like, "That just wasn't smart. I didn't know better." So the very first time, I used this as a way to bring it up for him. I used the fact that I'm in the Stake Relief presidency, and we are going to be teaching a lesson to the sisters about pornography and I just wanted to hear his thoughts and his perspective.

He thought I was making the entire thing up to see if there was some sort of issue going on there. Apparently, I didn't do a very good job of just bringing it up because I agree, it was very awkward and halting. He probably thought I was flying through my teeth. Then we had a discussion about it, and then he told me that he thought I was making it up. I was like, "No, that actually is. That is real. That's happening. We are going to go and teach about this."

But I'm so grateful that I did. I'm grateful that I had that first awkward conversation. I had a few others before I started learning how to just, you know, it didn't bother me to bring it up. I was very nonchalant about it. But I'm so grateful because now me and my husband can just sit and talk very openly. I can talk openly as a wife, saying, "Hey, these things are coming up. Hey, I'm struggling with this or that. Or maybe we're struggling and maybe there's something we can do to better overcome these things or to keep our home a safe place." It's been fantastic. We've been able to attend - what are they called? - conferences about the matter that the Utah Coalition against pornography puts on. It's just been a real help for us to be able to openly talk about it.

Kurt: I mean, because if you can't talk about unhealthy sexuality before marriage, you'll never be able to talk about healthy sexuality after marriage.

Stacie: Yeah. And that's a whole other discussion as well.

[crosstalk 00:37:43]

Kurt: But that's President Ferrell. Because there's this balance that the risks you run doing this type of lesson is that you don't want to shame the feeling. You don't want to shame anything. But it's easy if you just focus on like do's and don'ts, and this is bad, and this is why it's bad. Then you run that risk of shaming or stigmatizing the feelings in general.

So anything else you did to help them feel like, no, this is completely normal, normalization and that type of thing is have those feelings?

Kimberly: For me, one of the things in my personal preparation for the lessons was to think about how pornography affects me in my life, regardless of anybody else, and how I would react and what questions I would have if I were being taught a lesson like this. Having had my own experiences of encountering pornography, what do I wish that I knew in a lesson now and what do I wish I had gotten in a lesson before my first encounter with an erotic novel? What do I wish that someone had told me?

If someone had sat down with me, even my mom, even if my mom had sat down with me and said, "Hey, this is why we don't want to read these kinds of novels, and this is what they look like," if someone had told me that, then the first time I'd picked up that novel, it would have been a different experience rather than curiosity of I've never been around this before and I don't know what it's like, and I'm curious about it. I would have already had some of those questions answered, and I wouldn't have had to learn it the difficult way.

Kurt: Because there's a different context, right? In all my growing up lessons and so forth, it's like, you know, "Careful on the computer." That's the context, so you go to the internet for these things. But a lot of the times in the female perspective, and correct me if I'm wrong, but oftentimes it is those novels or those things that start the feelings, not necessarily the visual component of it. So not to put you on the spot, what are those principles as how [00:40:01] would you approach if your future daughter comes to you or you realize she's really loving novels and reading different things or the topic in general?

Kimberly: Well, I was thinking about this earlier, and I think it goes even a step back further of understanding sexuality better. To be personal, for me, the reason that I wanted to read that novel is, because I didn't know how sexual intimacy even worked. I didn't know what it was supposed to look like and I was afraid of it. And so I went into reading this novel, thinking, "Maybe if I understand a little better, I won't be so afraid to get married and to have those experiences myself." Because I had been in a situation where someone had been very frank and this is what it is.

Firstly, I'd start there and try and offer better understanding in an appropriate way of sexuality in general, and then go into pornography and to show how pornography takes the wonderful sexuality and twists it into something that is meant, one, to profit somebody else, and to harm you spiritually.

Dr. Ferrell: Can I ask a question? Sometimes you hear from adults and parents that, oh I don't want to talk about these things because I'm going to introduce my child to pornography and all these kinds of things. I'm surprised in the church how much resistance there is to have open conversations like this with maybe teenagers because we don't want to expose them to all this stuff. How would you respond to that?

Kimberly: I think there's one particular video on the church's website, which I love. It's so perfect for primary children. It's this stick figure boy, I think, and he sees a picture and he has the squirrels in his eyes of just depicting "I've seen something bad, and they don't know what to do with it." We teach that as primary kids and that's a perfect age-appropriate thing. But then we've carried that on throughout the rest of teenage years and into young single adulthood. So all I know about pornography is that it makes my eyes go into [unintelligible 00:42:27]?

Kaylyn: I think, for me, communication. I am not a parent; I am not married. But when I think about this topic, and when I think about my childhood, and when I think about my own personal struggles, I think a lot along the lines of what Kimberly was saying. If these type of things would have been communicated to me a little bit better, or more often, then I guess my story wouldn't have played out in the way that it did.

So I think talking to our children from a young age, a very young age first about sexuality, and then about the other aspects of it that are like the pornography and the masturbation, and then as they grow into older age, sexual intimacy with husband and wife. Communicating and letting them know like, "We're in this together and I am here to be your advocate and to answer your questions, so you can come to me. You don't need to go to anyone else, you can come to me as your parent, and I will help lead you and guide you to know correct principles and correct doctrine that are centered around a happy and healthy life."

Stacie: I think parents before could get away with "let's just keep the kids in the bubble." In Utah, we live in a bubble. They didn't have technology; they didn't have things like that. I mean, you had to buy magazine, or go to a red light district or things like that. It was much easier or viable back in the day to just say, "Nope, that's just something we don't talk about and we just teach abstinence without even teaching what on earth it is." And parents, whether you want to keep

with that viewpoint or not, I really think they need to realize that it's changed. You may say, "Well, I don't want to introduce them to it." Too bad. You already missed that boat. They've already been introduced.

Dr. Ferrell: That's the problem, many parents don't think their kids have been introduced.

Stacie: And I think a lot of times parents don't know how to approach the subject because maybe they don't know exactly what pornography is. Maybe they are also uncertain of "Hey, is that movie that I watch with my spouse, is that okay? Is that not? I don't really know. No one's really told me. I've never really looked into that." And so I think maybe sometimes [00:45:00] are like, "I don't even know if I'm the right person to talk about this," because maybe they weren't taught you there.

Kurt: Any other points you think back to this lesson you put together? Any other principles or points that you made sure you hit on that we haven't hit before we move on?

Kaylyn: Repentance.

Together: Yeah.

Dr. Ferrell: The Savior and the atonement is powerful way to talk about that.

Kurt: Kaylyn.

Kaylyn: Yeah. I think personally, this was my favorite part of the lesson. I feel like this is when the Spirit would really envelop the room when we would begin to talk about the Atonement of Jesus Christ and its ability to pull us out of darkness and to pull us out of anything that we may be struggling with, including pornography as a woman in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints - a very obscure topic that's not talked about a lot.

But as we were able to really tie this into Jesus Christ, and he knows us perfectly, and the fact of the matter is that you have not gone too far no matter what you have done. And you can turn and start to face Jesus Christ and take steps towards him. Then that was kind of when we would lead into, "And here's your Relief Society President. Here is someone that you can come to and you can openly speak to. And if you don't feel comfortable talking to her just yet, talk to a trusted friend, or talk to a trusted family member if you have one."

I think really opening up that dialogue towards the end was, again, just always my favorite part of like you can start to come out of the darkness that is the trap of pornography, or masturbation or addiction. Even if it's out of a smaller usage or a higher usage, no matter where you're at in your journey with this, you can start to turn to Jesus Christ and he will absolutely 100% be there for you. I don't know. I mean, that's why we do what we do in the church. That's why we practice what we practice and believe what we believe.

If we can tie any principle of the gospel or any commandment back to Jesus Christ, and really help them to see he's here for you, then I think that that starts to build the bridge of, "Okay, I can

start walking across that bridge, and I can make it back to him regardless of my experiences or my choices." So I think we really tried to communicate that in a way that was like, okay, now we've taught you all of this, we've introduced these topics, now, here's what you can do about it.

Stacie: Along with that, we made sure as well to include that everyone needed to use the Atonement of Jesus Christ. That, hey, guess what, maybe you haven't been affected by it, or maybe...I mean, we really tried to break that bubble as well - just you are being affected by it. It is all around you. You can't keep trudging through it yourself. You need the enabling power of Christ's atonement. You need his help and his strength and that relationship with Christ.

Because I don't think we wanted any sister kind of feeling like, "I have an issue with that. I don't need to listen to this." That's not true. Because it's not at any stage, now or later, it's going to be an issue or already is and you're just not aware of it. So we tried to make them aware, but then really press of that strengthening power of Christ that can overcome that, that can help. Because it can be very disparaging also as we see how the world is turning, and how rampant pornography is to be like, "Man, raising kids in this, or just being married in this, or just any stage of my life in this world can seem a little despairing." So I think we've really tried to bring that hope into it of there's someone who is stronger.

Kurt: I would imagine this is sort of at the tail end as you're wrapping up in this lesson. That this is the main message of redemption and hope and repentance, right? And that's the key.

Stacie: You have to include that.

Kaylyn: You have to.

Kimberly: I don't remember if it was our presidency or the next presidency that I was in, but do you remember, we would write down lessons, and then the topic of the lesson, and after everyone, we would add, "and Jesus Christ." So for this lesson, it was pornography, masturbation, and Jesus Christ.

So we made sure that at least half of the lesson, if not, the whole lesson was about the Savior and how he needs to be present in every struggle you're going through. In everything in your life, he needs to be right there with you. [00:50:00] Even if you don't feel like you can talk about it to anyone yet, you can talk about it to him, and then he'll help you to talk to somebody else, so that you can spiritually vomit and get it off of your soul so that you can start to heal. But you don't get to the Savior after you go to the bishop. You get to the Savior by yourself.

Kurt: I love that. Because, as you're giving example of all these different people you can talk to, the bishop, the Relief Society President, don't leave Christ out of that lineup. Because there are probably people that are petrified to talk to anybody about it, but they can go in prayer and talk to their father in heaven and use the power of the atonement of Jesus Christ in that process.

Kimberly: Right. And you go back - and I think we talked about this too - the whole purpose of going to your bishop is so that you can heal. Like I said, you don't go to the bishop so that you can talk to God about it. You've already talked to him and that's why you're with the bishop. So

the reason that you talk to Relief Society president first is so that you can begin the healing when you're not ready to go talk to a man about it. But the whole purpose of talking to the bishop and the stake president and working with those leaders is so you can complete the repentance and be whole again.

Kurt: I love that theme that's come out of this, especially through this lesson is that confession with repentance, that's sort of that primary level, that's one of the steps, it's a topic. But you can't get to true confession unless you can first start a dialogue of some type, whether that dialogue is in prayer to your Father in heaven, or the friend, or Relief Society president. And then down the road, we'll get to confession. I'm sure both of us had confessions as leaders that we thought, this isn't really healing because you haven't even had a dialogue on any level about this topic, and you're just like trying to pull these words out of you. And so having that dialogue, it sounds like. I mean, that just stimulates that progress so they can get to confession. We can't expect confession upfront.

Stacie: Well, if you look at the ARP, the churches Addiction Recovery Program, it's what? Confession is step 5? Five or six or something?

Kaylyn: Yeah, five or six.

Stacie: Out of the 12 steps? I mean, that's like saying halfway through the process is about the time that true confession to your bishop. And even still, I know many people who they've gone through the 12 steps many times before they're necessarily feeling ready to go to a bishop.

Kurt: It's easy, you know, going back to the relationship, to maybe find your significant other looking at pornography and like, "You need to go see that bishop. Go and confess right now. We need to get this handled." But that step isn't step 1.

Stacie: No, it's not.

Kimberly: Something else that has come personally, for me, from this lesson process was opening the dialogue so that when I was dating my husband, we were sitting in the car, and I was able to say, "Okay, what's your experience with pornography because President Ferrell said that everybody has experiences with pornography. So what's yours like?" And he was able to share with me what his experience was.

Then, I don't know why, but he then turned to me and said, "What's your experience with it?" And because of this whole foundation and the lesson, I was like, "Okay, here's my experience with it." Then we gave each other a hug, and we're like, okay, "We're going to experience this together now." And we do. And it looks different than the way that Stacie and her husband do, it looks different than the way that any couple experiences things together, but we know that we can talk about it. And it's not scary, like, "Oh, this happened to me today. Oh, I'm so sorry. And the reason that I want to talk to you about it is because I know that you want to help me."

Kaylyn: I really love that point. In preparation for this, I was at dinner with two great guys that I've become very close friends with. We had just finished a session at the temple, and we were

sitting around and I was like, "I have a topic for you guys. Let's start talking." So we started discussing this, and I asked them, I said, "Have either of you ever asked girls that you are seriously dating about their experience with pornography?" And both of them said no. So it opened up this really good dialogue of, "Well, maybe you should."

I think based on my experiences, I would love if someone would ask me that I was dating seriously. Because for me to bring it up and to say, "This is my experience," without being asked is difficult because of the shame that is surrounded this topic. I feel like I've done a lot of work to overcome the shame that I felt for a lot of years because of my experiences. But for someone that I am in a committed [00:55:00] relationship with that is progressing towards marriage, I would be thrilled if they just turned to me and said, "Let's talk about your experience now." Instead of just me having to ask them, I would love.

Kimberly: And what a relief, it is to know that this was part of something that I'm trying to recover from, this is something that's always going to be something that happened to me, or whether it happens again, or whatever it's real, and I don't have to keep it from you.

Kurt: I love that question. I mean, such a simple question, because the typical question is, is pornography a problem for you, right? It's generally only directed at men. But if everybody, I mean, go to statistics, I think about 30%, 40% have this, but just everybody has some experience with it in some form, whether it's heavily looking at it or experiencing it, or you know somebody, a friend of a friend that does that. So just that simple question of what's your experience with pornography, I mean, that opens the door of dialogue. That's awesome.

Stacie: I think with opening that door, especially if you are the ministering sister that someone comes and talks to or you're the Relief Society president that a sister decides to open up to, one of the best pieces of advice that I could give is, first and foremost, when they do, show them how much you love them, tell them how much you love them, and let them know you're not judging or running away. Because I feel like that's what Christ would do first. He'd very first and foremost, say, "I love you."

I mean, that's what that person is terrified about. They feel like, "Oh, I'm this disgusting, horrible person. I'm the only person who has this issue." You as a leader, or as a friend, or as a potential spouse can say, "You know what, let's keep that dialogue open because I love." You can help show Christ's love for them. Then when maybe they're not really listening or believing that Christ loves them, but if one person can still love them, maybe they'll then start to open up and believe maybe Christ can.

Kimberly: Speaking from a leader standpoint, for the people that you're teaching, for the class, for instance, you don't expect your teacher to say, "I have a problem." You expect the leaders of the church to be perfect. If I'm going to my Relief Society president and saying, "I have a problem," and expecting her to say, "Wow, wow, you're broken," versus I go to my friend and say, "I'm broken," and she says, "Oh, me too," then that's where the listening and the healing and help come together.

And that can come from leaders because the leaders have just the same struggles as everybody else. Because there was nothing that qualified me and probably not them either, but nothing that qualified me to be called into the Stake Relief Society presidency except a willing heart, because everybody's got their past. So you go to your Bishop, and say, "Okay, here, perfect man, I'm telling you that I'm broken," versus "I know that you're a real person too and you've shown me that I can trust you with my broken pieces because I know that you're broken too."

Kurt: And along that same vein, there are these wonderful priesthood leaders out there that are terrified stiff about approaching this subject with the Relief Society or women in their ward, and they may see this, like, "Great, I'm going to have the Relief Society presidency talk with these women. I don't have to deal with it." But what advice would you have for male priesthood leaders who they don't necessarily know that they need to talk about directly with you, especially in maybe one on one setting? What advice would you have when they're just like, "I don't know what to say or what to do, so I just don't do anything?"

Whitney: I think the phrase that comes to mind and just having seen and helped different sisters through multiple different processes is the phrase lovingly bold. I think when you're in a leadership position and somebody comes to you, I'll be honest, I was super uncomfortable when some sisters approached me, and then like, "Your lesson really impacted me and I need help." It takes you a step back to be like, "Okay, well, what's going to come out? Is this okay?" And realize that it is okay. This is again, the time for them to express and to vomit.

Then be able to ask questions that are bold. Because I think a lot of times in the church, we try to not use the direct terminology, maybe we don't know it, or we don't know how to say it. But I think being able to do that, in a loving way, not a stern or kind of diminishing or demeaning way, [01:00:00] allows that person to feel like they are in a safe place. I think the greatest thing I love about the gospel is it's safe with Christ. Whereas a leader, if you can help create an environment that's safe where the Savior's there and this person has that opportunity, they're going to be more willing to share that. And the Spirit's going to direct you as a leader what you need to ask specifically.

Stacie: I would say, for a male priesthood leader, if you haven't already, I would say talk to your wife. If you have not talked to your wife about her experience with pornography, if you have not started opening conversations with maybe your daughters, or at least with her about the subject, I'd start there. Especially if you're worried about how to help the sisters in your ward, I think a great in would be to be comfortable enough talking about it within your family. And then you could bring it up, "Hey, my wife was saying the other day or we were talking to our daughters about this." And suddenly you are showing them that, "Hey, I understand that this does affect women and we're going to be open and talking about it."

I remember that something President Ferrell would do is he would always...he was a male priesthood leader who maybe didn't know how to handle the subject with 18 to 29-year-old young woman, he would talk about how him and his family fought against it, and let them know

that it was something that he was very open about and doing. That to me was always a great example. That's just what I would suggest to some priesthood leaders.

Kurt: Awesome. As we wrap up, I assume there were some slides that went with this presentation?

Together: No.

Kurt: No. Okay, no slides.

Dr. Ferrell: Unfortunately, not.

Kurt: That's fine. I'm just curious if you remember off the top of your head what are some resources that you mentioned to the sisters that they could turn to. And maybe we've mentioned some of them, but was there sort of a laundry list of resources?

Dr. Ferrell: They were hard to find then.

Kaylyn: I would say that they're a little bit easier to find now than they were four years ago with websites and things that the church has produced. So we'd recommend those. Also, I know we referenced The Strength of Youth. And I know, there was a recent General Conference talk that encouraged everyone to go back and reread The Strength of Youth and how that doesn't really expire. Then there was also one more General Conference taught given by a sister, I believe it was Linda Kay Reeves. I'm pulling that out of my head. I think it was her.

Kurt: We'll link to all this.

Kaylyn: It was actually the first mention of pornography usage and the relation to women that had ever been mentioned in General Conference.

Kurt: Oh, wow.

Kaylyn: So we actually pulled excerpts from that as well from ours. And I reference back to that a lot because it was like a monumental moment when that was spoken over the pulpit in General Conference, and I thought, "How powerful is that to start bringing this up in conversation?" Those are the ones that are coming to my mind.

Stacie: There are 12 step meetings that the church puts on. With that, I was a little surprised by this, but maybe there's something that the sisters can do personally about it, because I was looking up within 100-mile radius of us how many Addiction Recovery meetings there are, specifically for pornography. There's 90 from the church within 100 miles of us. That's pretty good.

Of those, nine of them are women based ones or women only once. That's a little more rough because that means you don't have as many options, may not feel comfortable going to one that's both men and woman. I'd say, you know what, I don't think the church is against there

being more that are for women, or for YSA. Maybe if you're to that point, talk to your bishop or your Relief Society president and see if there is a way that you could start one in your stake. I don't know what the logistics of that are.

Kaylyn: The ARP meetings I attend are at a stake level. They don't have YSA stakes in California, so it's just a general stake. I attend a coed class that's a general Addiction Recovery program class, and there are typically, maybe about eight of us and three of us are women, and two of us are YSA age. I know that that's a challenge and other places within the church. California is even well populated.

But I would say [01:05:00] something that we could recommend or start doing is if you're a sister that is well into recovery, and you feel confident and comfortable talking about it, start having meetings at your house. Start doing like a Come Follow Me type thing of like, "Hey, like, let's start just..." I mean, obviously, talk to your bishop about it and make sure that's okay thing to move forward with. But kind of like, "Let's make this less of a taboo topic, and just start where we're at, and not wait for the stake to do something about it."

I think moving forward, the other YSA that goes to ARP with me reached out to me a few weeks ago and said, "Hey, we're going to start YSA ARP meeting. It might be the three of us to begin, the one that's facilitating, then you and I, but we'll see how it goes and we'll try to build it from there." So I think just starting where we're at and lifting because this is something that we need to start tackling. And I know that we are starting to tackle it as a church, but as individuals and as families.

Kurt: I love what you said there because the first step would be go to the ARP website and see what sort of women's groups are available, or they have coed type options as well. And if it's not there, the resource isn't there, be that spark to start the resource in your area. And the resources are there, you know, the church has produced them, it's just matter of somebody finding them and doing the legwork to create them in that area.

Let's wrap up. Whitney, as the Relief Society President Emeritus of that stake, I want you to have the final word here as far as what this did for those sisters just generally speaking. What encouragement would you have for that Relief Society president out there is thinking, "I don't know how to do with this, or what should I do?" What encourage what would you give to Relief Society presidents around this topic?

Whitney: I would say to have courage because Satan is rampant and he's raging right now, and his goal is to destroy us as individuals and as women and as men. This is a topic that he's using to kill us. I think by being able to take the courage and to trust that God's going to help you with it, He's not going to leave you hanging, you're going to have the support you need. And if this is something you feel like you need to share in your family, with a friend or in a Relief Society, I would say move forward with it and watch the miracles happen.

Because I feel like for me when President Ferrell had given me the direction, you know, I want to see more sisters in the temple, and then this became the topic, I was like, "Oh, my ward, what

are we getting ourselves into?" And I mean, here we are four years later still talking about this. I'm really humbled to have had the opportunity to been through that. But I would say, don't let Satan stop you. And he's going to do whatever he can to stop you so continue to move forward like that.