

(Sisters, both sessions were not the same, I had different impressions at different times but below is everything that I presented, so some if it will be new and some will sound much better than when I actually said it! You can shrink the font. I have it on a large setting for me to read because I was too vain to wear my old lady glasses. ☺)

A BEND IN THE ROAD

My journey of hope and healing
by
Susan Jackson

Hello Sisters. It is such an honor to be in the company of you amazing women. I love the theme, **“Be Strong and of a Good Courage for the Lord Thy God Will Not Fail Thee”** and to that I add, **especially** when we think all is lost. Thank you so much for coming and spending this time with me today as we venture down this road. Any experiences that I share in addition to my own I do so with permission and am very grateful to these individuals for their selflessness and sacrifice. Most of all, my husband Jeff who not only allowed me to share this, but encouraged me to. I will be speaking very plainly and some things may be offensive to your soul, because they are, however I will be addressing them in the way that they are taught through church materials.

My name is Susan Jackson. I was raised in Utah in an active LDS family. I married a returned missionary in the temple; we had 6 children and have always been active in the church, each holding various callings. We had family home evening, family prayer, and family scripture study. Not every day, we were more of the variety that has read First Nephi 100 times. Jeff and I attended the temple fairly regularly; our goal was 12 times a year, which we usually met. We were full tithe payers (so I thought – I later learned differently). Jeff would teach lessons on the evils of pornography to our children. We often talked about this as we saw other marriages fall apart, but I never saw this coming.

3 years ago we were living in Medina Ohio. In my personal life I felt the need to have a greater understanding of the Atonement and I began praying to learn. On Friday, March 9th, 2012 as I was driving I had an over whelming impression that said, “Your family is about to experience a tragedy”. My first thought was – oh no! Which one of my children? My mind went through all of the scenarios of what it could be and I really felt myself begin to experience panic. But as quickly as that thought came it left as I said to myself, “No matter what it is, I will be fine as long as I have Jeff.” The next day Jeff and I went to the Columbus Temple and were asked to be the witness couple. I

felt the need to be there because of that experience I had just had but as we sat in the temple he was very disconnected and distracted. I remember him fidgeting quite a bit and I was unsettled that he was so uncomfortable.

I had just been called to be the Stake Young Women's Camp Director, which was a dream calling for me, I love the Young Women. I had a big meeting coming up so I had the, you know, cute handouts with chocolate to give out to the sisters that would be attending. So after sacrament meeting on Sunday I went around and handed them out. My husband was the gospel doctrine teacher and I was late getting into the chapel for Sunday School, where the class was held. For all of his lessons he had these great handouts but when I went in they were gone. I knew the website that he got them from so when I sat down and saw his phone sitting there, I just thought I'd look it up and follow along. I was having trouble accessing the internet, so I clicked on downloads. There came up a long list, some looked technical but most of which were pornographic. I froze in my seat, looked up at my husband and back at that list. I thought, "This has got to be a mistake. Not MY husband. MY husband would never do anything like this." I wasn't sure what to do, but I needed to leave the room. So I waited for him to have his back to the class, because I didn't want to rattle him, gathered my things and left. I found an empty primary room, went in and closed the door. I sat there with this phone in my hand, just shaking. I prayed for the strength to know what to do. I knew that I didn't want to open anything obviously pornographic, but I thought, "This trash attaches itself to everything. I can at least see what he was trying to download. I can't accuse him of something that I don't know." So I opened one of "technical" looking ones. It was a video clip, the most vile, disgusting thing I have ever seen and I could not shut it off fast enough. ***I knew.*** I knew then that something was terribly wrong, but I didn't know what to do. I prayed for help and courage.

I left the primary room, but I couldn't go back into Sunday school and I waited outside the chapel doors until class was over. When they finished and Jeff came out I went up to him and said, "I need to talk to you outside". In a light hearted way he asked, "Why? What did I do?" I said, "We need to go outside." I didn't want to embarrass him. Just outside our bishop's office was a door that went outside. We went out and I continued to pray for help to know what to say. I said, "How long has it been going on?"

He said, "How long has what been going on?"

I said, "I found it on your phone, how long?"

He said, "What did you find on my phone?"

Now at that moment I was ready to buckle. I didn't want this to be my life. This isn't what I signed up for. If I just left it alone, maybe it wouldn't be real and it would

just go away. But the spirit told me what to say and I said, "Please don't treat me like an idiot, how long?"

He said, "Two years" In that moment the spirit clearly said to me these words, "This is just the tip of the iceberg." So I said, "We're going into the bishop right now."

Our bishop was coming out of his office just as we got there and he could see that something was terribly wrong and took us right in. We went inside and I showed him Jeff's phone. Jeff started to confess and after a few minutes I couldn't take it. We had two cars at the church. I told him I was taking one and was going home. But I couldn't go home and of course I picked the car that was almost out of gas. I am a stickler about keeping the Sabbath Day Holy and shopping on Sunday is something that we don't do. Even buying gas, but I decided, "The Ox is in the mire! I am buying gas!" So I filled the tank and just started to drive. I drove for 2 hours and ended up on the door step of some of our Amish friends. **I needed to get away and their remote community felt safe.** Mary and Henry Yoder came to their door, could see that my eyes were red and puffy from crying, they asked if I was ok, I said, "I just happened to be in the neighborhood". They welcomed me in and let me cry on their shoulders. I told them what had just happened, and that I didn't know what to do. They were not judgmental of me or of Jeff. They simply said, "We have this in our community too. You just stay here as long as you need to."

I slept on their couch for about an hour and then decided that I should get home for my kids. I checked my phone and had a message from Jeff asking if he was allowed to know where I was. I thought NO! I also had a message from my bishop asking me to call him, so I did. I asked if Jeff was going to be excommunicated. He said no, not if it is limited to what he told me in my office. I asked him to tell me everything that Jeff said because I wouldn't believe 2 words out of Jeff's mouth. He didn't tell me anything new, **had asked Jeff to give him his temple recommend, released him from his calling and asked him not to take the sacrament.** I asked him what I should do, I had no idea. He said that he would be there to help us and he would check on us the next day. I said ok and I went home.

I got home and thankfully my children were away at a youth meeting. I am not a good liar and they know if something is wrong. I just couldn't face them. I went to Jeff and said, "You have one shot to save this marriage and that is to tell me everything right now." He told me more things that he hadn't told the bishop, hard to hear. My mind was swirling. I didn't know which way was up. I needed to escape I wanted to wake up from this horrid nightmare, but I couldn't. I slept alone in my room that night and Jeff slept in the living room. I needed comfort and help, but I couldn't go to him for it. I wanted to run to him and at the same time I wanted to run from him. It was

such a long night. I couldn't sleep and I decided that if I couldn't sleep then he shouldn't either so I would go and turn the light on and leave. Then after it had been turned off, I would go and turn it on again. Somewhere around 3 am I couldn't sleep and I went and just sat in the room. I thought I had to police his actions and make sure he didn't get up and do any of this stuff that he had just told me about. I watched him sleep and thought, "I don't know who you are. How come I couldn't see this?" I knew he had been stressed with work over the years, I knew that he had struggles with depression, his weight and his self esteem, but I never, never imagined this. I had felt a great distance in our relationship and had been doing everything that I knew to improve it. And there were wonderful times in our marriage over the years, he was very kind he was very giving and supportive. I spoke openly with him; I expressed my feelings, and tried to make it safe for him to express his. I had just ordered every book that the church produced on eternal marriage and that box came 3 days before. For Valentine's Day that year I had given him a blown glass Salt Lake Temple, to replace the 3 that had broken over the years because of children and moves. I had also had our wedding pictures scanned and reprinted in a new album. I filled the book with memories of our wedding day and special feelings that I had for him. Both of which were in this room where he was sleeping.

So, there I sat in the dark, listening to him breath and having no idea where my life would go from here.

This, sisters, is called **DISCOVERY**. It is the first solid step on this journey. Discovery is learning that you have an addicted loved one and all that entails. It is the spouses choice to determine how much they will learn about their loved ones addiction. Discovery is a process, it happens over a period of time. It is like peeling an onion. So, even though I wanted Jeff to tell me everything that had happened in that moment, he couldn't even if he wanted to. I needed to know everything because I needed to know exactly what I was facing. If he didn't tell me, I would have assumed the worst and just left him. Typically this addiction begins in youth, Jeff's first exposure was when he was 7, long before I ever met him. Jeff's memories of his acting out would come back 2 at a time. **(acting out is when an addict chooses to engage in their addiction)** Sometimes he would come to me and tell me that he remembered 2 more things, sometimes I would ask questions that would trigger memories and he would tell me 2 more and then 2 more and then 2 more. I didn't know **RAGE** until this. But it is real. I tried to prepare myself for him to tell me things and would make fists and dig my fingernails into my hands so I would be ready. We just try to cope the best we can with the knowledge and life experiences that we have.

I felt like I had been hit by a train and that my body parts were scattered. Well meaning friends would offer help. I felt like saying, “Call the dang ambulance! Can’t you see my body parts all over the ground!” I needed an expert who knew how I could be all put back together. Someone who had already walked this road and knew how to navigate it.

Physically, I couldn’t do anything. I felt like I had just checked out of life. I couldn’t eat, I couldn’t keep anything down. My body seemed to be trying to get rid of all of these horrid images by vomiting it out. I lost 9 pounds in 9 days, ultimately losing 20 pounds and my doctor put me on antidepressants, which were an absolute life saver! Through this I realized that there are times that our bodies stop producing the normal hormones that we need to feel balanced, when that happens we need the help. I am so very grateful for the miracle of modern medicine.

I knew that I needed to educate myself on this addiction. I didn’t know ANYTHING about masturbation, pornography addiction or sex addiction. I couldn’t even say the word Masturbation. However, I did learn that you do not Google it! I already knew the world’s view on this and needed direction from a spiritual view, so I went on to Deseret Book and ordered every book that had to do with pornography. While I waited for them to come I spent my time on lds.org and there is a ton of information there! I just wish I had known all of it before.

Pornography as defined by True to the Faith is: ANY material depicting or describing the human body or sexual conduct in a way that arouses sexual feelings.¹

I met often with the bishop and received wise counsel from him, sometimes Jeff and I met together, sometimes separately. I told him that I knew that I needed to go to church, but I couldn’t go to Sunday school, that’s where I found out, I couldn’t go to Relief Society, that’s where all of the women with perfect families are (isn’t that what we think), I asked him to please let me hide out in the nursery. I served as the primary president for many years and nursery was our hardest calling to staff. I started the nursery the next Sunday which was a huge blessing in my life. Those little ones are honest, genuine and they know love.

The Bishop assured me that I was not alone and that there were many sisters in the same situation that I was in. Of course confidentiality is always protected and no names were given, but that still didn’t seem to give me any comfort. I found many articles on the Church’s website written by spouses all of which were, Name Withheld, Names have been changed or Anonymous. I really didn’t need another nameless faceless story.

¹ [True to the Faith](#) - Pornography pg. 118

The Bishop counseled us not to do anything drastic about the marriage for at least a year, which was very wise because the desire to escape the situation is huge and divorce sounds like an end to the pain. He gave us each a copy of the church's ***Addiction Recovery Manual***. This is written by **addicts in recovery** with support of Church leaders and qualified counseling professionals. Even though it is an incredible program, it was difficult for me because it is written **to** addicts. It talks about Your addiction, Your choices, Your behavior, Your need to change. I started out ok with this, it is a workbook and there are questions and places to write. But my notes got angrier and angrier as I went along, I crossed out things (it is not MY addiction) but I made it my first time through the book.

My bishop also counseled us to make sure we had 30 minutes with the Lord daily. It could be 29 minutes in scripture reading and 1 minute in prayer or 1 minute in scripture reading and 29 minutes in prayer. After this meeting Jeff said he thought that I should start in the Book of Mormon. Well, first of all since the suggestion came from him there was no way I was going to follow that. And the spirit clearly said, "stay right where you are." So I did. In my personal scripture study I had just finished the 4 gospels and was starting the letters of Paul. Paul talks a lot about marriage, fidelity, chastity, all of which were difficult to hear because I didn't feel like I had any of that.

But through my scripture study an amazing thing happened for me. Paul introduced me to my Savior in a way that I had never known him. Especially on the harder days, I read, it was like the air I needed and provided help and comfort. When I got to the end of Paul's writings I felt a loss. The rest of the New Testament was great too, but I really felt that in Paul I had gained a friend. One day I will meet him and I will thank him for walking beside me on the darkest days of this journey.

My prayers also changed and I developed a relationship with my Father in Heaven like I had never had before. I was excited to kneel at my bedside to really talk to him. My Dad is great. I am so blessed that he is my earthly father. Through this I have developed that same loving relationship with my Heavenly Father and often times on my knees just felt like saying, Hey Dad, can I just talk to you for a minute.

My relationship with my Savior changed. I always believed IN him but through this I am learning how to BELIEVE HIM. Either he came, or he didn't. Either he atoned for my sins, or he didn't. And if he atoned for my sins, he atoned for Jeff's too. Either he provided the way for complete change, or he didn't.

In Luke he talks about a man named Zachaeus who is a publican and publicans are not thought of as the good guys. Not only was he a publican but he was CHIEF OF THE PUBLICANS. Zachaeus wanted to see the Savior but was a short guy, so he climbed up a tree to be able to see. So, I know Zachaeus and I would be friends (since

I'm short too). The Savior saw Zachaeus and said, "Make haste, come down; for today I must abide at thy house" The people murmured and judged saying that Christ was going to the home of a sinner. But the Lord knew Zachaeus. Luke 19:9-10 "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he is also a son of Abraham. For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jeff is a son of God, and everything that pertains to other children of God pertains to him. It is my responsibility to forgive. I will come back to forgiveness later.

Elder Oaks said that there are times in our lives that a particular scripture verse or passage will be opened to us and have new meaning. I have experienced this recently. I had thought that the parable of the Wise Man and the Foolish Man was something that I had down. You know, the wise man built his house upon the rock. I know the song and the actions...done! I felt like I had missed something in the story, so I went back and read it again.

We already know that building on a sandy foundation is bad, got that point down. But when it came to building on the Rock, which is our Savior, I pictured a pretty home, picket fence, "roses bloom beneath our feet", quite a serene little picture. But that isn't what the promise is. The promise is that the house will stand. The scripture says, Matthew 7:25 "*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*" The rain, the floods and the winds will beat upon that house. Maybe the shutters are blown off, there are broken windows, the roof may leak and there may be debris all over the yard, but the house will stand. That is the promise that through the storm WE WILL STAND! After this the cleanup effort starts (recovery) but fortunately there is the Spiritual Home Depot! (Addiction Recovery Program, scriptures, prayer, etc.)

Jeff has a job that requires a lot of travel, which I blamed this on first, but have since learned that it doesn't matter where you are. All this addiction needs to thrive is secrecy. He called in his vacation time, stayed home and we started our journey down a very unfamiliar road. Something that is important here is that Jeff wanted to heal. He didn't know how to start his healing, he didn't want to come forward because of fear and he prayed for help. He said he knew he had a problem because he knew he was doing things that were wrong, he just didn't know how to stop his behavior. He'd hear the lessons and general conference talks about the evils of it and to stop it, but most of the time he tuned it out because of guilt. He tried to work through his own form of repentance and would pray for the strength to quit. After our son returned from his mission he had the realization that he was addicted and committed that this time if he couldn't stop, he would go to the bishop. He couldn't stop and he couldn't go to the bishop. His prayers changed then. He wanted out. He prayed for the Lord to allow the

things happen that were necessary for him to be found out. He was the only member of our family to have a smart phone and it was one of the ways that he accessed pornography. He remembered one day looking at his phone and the thought came, "If you don't get a new phone you will be discovered." He didn't know which source that prompting was coming from because he felt a pull from both sides. Evil encouraging him to get a new phone and the spirit offering him an answer to his prayer, a way out.

Before discovery his plan had been to take this secret to his grave. Now, many of my comments to him have been less than kind. My comment this time was, "How selfish can you be? Here the kids and I are trying our best to be an eternal family. Let's say that we make it there at the end of our lives and then what? We'll be looking for you and you won't be there. So now I'm just assigned to somebody else?"

He said, "Well, I would do everything so that you and the kids could have all the blessings that you deserve. The promise is that if you live faithful you will not be deprived of any blessing."

I said, "It's not true. Because I wouldn't have you and you are the blessing that I chose."

I would love to say that my words made some miraculous change in Jeff, but they simply didn't. Addiction changes the way that our brains process information. Even though he heard the words he didn't HEAR the words.

1 week after discovery Jeff and I had begun separate counseling. 2 months after we began marriage counseling together. As a loved one of an addict, we have our own needs in the healing process. Forgiveness is a true principle, but it is not as simple as, "just go home and forgive." The first thing my counselor told me was none of this was my fault. As the spouse, that is hard to believe, we tend to blame ourselves right away. The second thing she told me was that this is an addiction. To which I said, "I don't care! I just want it out of my life. Tell me what to do." Well, it would have been great if she could have, but of course she couldn't. She did say to me, "Susan, you will recover from this. But your recovery won't be like this (diagonal line ascending up) it will be like this, (jagged diagonal line ascending up). But on these down days you need to recognize where you came from and see where you are and recognize that you are making progress." Those down days are tough because they feel like the bottom has completely dropped out! But in reality it hasn't, there is progress, it's just hard to see on those days.

I hadn't told anyone else at this point and debated whether or not to tell my parents. Jeff was very supportive of me telling those that would give me support. He actually encouraged me to tell my parents, but I was worried about word getting out further than that. (Yeah, now here I am!) My parents were in Africa serving a mission

and I didn't want to worry them, but they knew that something was wrong without my telling them. You know how parents are. I finally called and told them. The first thing they said was, "Do you want us to come home?" That's my awesome parents. They always put others before themselves. I told them no, please finish your mission. I will be ok and would be in constant contact. They told me that their home in Utah was open to me if I ever needed it.

Shortly after speaking with my parents I started getting urgent texts from a close friend saying that she really needed to talk to me. I ignored them, but they came one right after another and I thought that my parents, well meaningly, must have told her so that I would have some support in the states. Irritated I replied to her text saying, "How did you find out?" She replied, "How did I find out what? I just needed to talk to you because a friend of mine just committed suicide." I felt horrible. I called her, told her what was happening, she cried with me and said, "I know exactly what you're going through." I said, "You too?" And she told me her story. Hers was a story of hope. A couple making it through this. FINALLY I wasn't alone! Someone that I knew, I had a name and a face and a greater measure of hope.

Through a very miraculous series of events I met a sister in my area who was going through this same thing. She offered to go to the temple with me. It is a 2 hour drive for us so we had plenty of time to talk. She selflessly told me her story. The similarities were shocking to me. We made it to the temple and I have never felt so nervous going in. The first time I ever went to the temple (other than as a youth) was with Jeff. There had never been a time I went that he couldn't attend until now. It was a difficult session, hearing covenants that we had made and he had broken. At a designated time in the session I stood for a sacred moment of prayer. My tears dripped to the floor, as I could not contain them. My friend and I sat in the Celestial Room afterwards, but it felt quite empty to me. I am sure I was being blessed with some measure of peace, but at that moment my anguish was so strong that I couldn't detect it. But I had made it back to the temple with the help of a friend. I knew I needed to go again and that I could. And another tender mercy, another friend experiencing healing.

Jeff began attending the Addiction Recovery Meetings that our stake provided, but there wasn't one for me. I needed some help, so I decided to run away from home. It was spring break, I didn't trust Jeff alone, so I left when the kids could babysit him. I went to Utah and only told my sister that I was coming. I told her that I didn't want any dinner invitations, I didn't want any visits, I would be in our parent's home and I needed time alone. With my parents on their mission, their home was empty which is why I chose to stay there. My plan was to fly in, rent a car, take the time I need, get myself back to the airport and back to Ohio without seeing anyone. I could get into the

house with a hidden key. Unfortunately that key had been moved, so when I arrived there at 11:30 at night I had to go to my brother's home, just a block away, and ask for a key. Of course they were surprised to see me, I said "I just happened to be in the neighborhood" That seemed to work for me before, and told them it was a long story and I would tell them later. I spent that time in Utah going to the temple as much as I could. It was hard to do, but I needed it so badly. One day as I sat weeping in the Celestial Room a sister approached me and asked if I was ok. I didn't know her so I felt it was safe to tell her what was going on in my life. She just hugged me and said her husband is the bishop of a BYU student ward. In their recent training they said 100% of the young men coming to BYU have viewed pornography, it is a question now of what they are doing with it. She recommended a book to me, "Conquering our Own Goliaths".

I went to Deseret Book to buy this book and any others that I didn't already get off their website. I stood in front of this book section for quite a while. Surely someone will see me buy them. You know how when you run out to the store "real quick" without your hair and makeup done you always run into someone? That was my thought, so this was my first real courageous step in this battle. I just didn't care if someone saw, I knew that I needed the help and I was determined to get it.

I went back home to Ohio to try again. The revelation that it would be an up and down road was so true! I had been told right away that my emotions would swing like a pendulum to the very extremes. Also very true! But that I needed to recognize that that was normal even though nothing in this situation felt normal. It would be 1 step forward and 3 steps back for me. Jeff kept track of his progress of his recovery (continuous days clean) on a missionary countdown calendar. He committed to me that he would tell me within 24 hours if he relapsed. Every day he filled in another circle and I would feel relieved that he made it through another day, but wonder if he was being honest. I had no trust for him, which is ironic. Now that he was being honest with me I believed all of the horrible things that he had done, but I couldn't believe the good.

In May of 2012 Jeff was disfellowshipped for the period of 1 year. This is not something that is done lightly by our leaders. It with careful consideration. The individual and the spouse also have say in the process. Jeff asked them to pass down the hardest sentence they could. He said, "I don't want to repeat this lesson. I want to learn it this time." I have always had a negative or fearful feeling toward church courts because I associated discipline with punishment. But I learned the real definition of the word:

discipline

1. systematic training in obedience to regulations and authority
2. a branch of learning or instruction
3. the laws governing members of a Church

I really like the one that says, “a branch of learning or instruction”. This is what we experienced through Jeff’s church discipline. Other than in the temple, I have never felt the spirit more strongly than in that little room where we met. There was love, compassion and not one of those men shunned us, avoided us, felt awkward around us, they just loved us.

I needed more help for myself so at the end of the school year we decided to spend the summer in Utah. I arrived a couple of weeks before Jeff and the rest of the kids did and looked up a friend that I believed could help me. She had been my young women’s president when I was growing up. She was perfect, perfect husband, perfect family, perfect life or so we thought. We did not know that she was a prescription drug addict. She ended up spending time in jail in attempts to support her habit. While she was there one of the female guards said to her, “What are you doing here? You don’t fit in here, you belong in relief society or something.” She had hit rock bottom and was finally ready to commit to change. She was in the pilot program of the ARP and was experiencing great recovery for herself, 15 years clean! So, I found her at church and told her what was going on. Within minutes after church she was at my parents home with a list of all the meetings that I could go to for me. I said, “This is good for me, but I’m fine. Jeff is the one that needs help. What are the ones for him.” She told me that I needed to surrender his recovery and not try to run it. I didn’t think I was. I told her I completely understood surrender. I read the books! I was 3 months in and I was just fine! She then said something to me that I will never forget, “Susan, you can’t save him. He already has a Savior.” My eyes were then beginning to open to that understanding and much more would come in the future, and still comes today. This was the moment that I really gave myself permission to recover. Recovery for ME!

I took the list of meetings from her and went to the first one that I could. I reviewed my copy of the ARP filled with my angry notes and scribbles. I thought, “How did all of these four letter words get in here? That’s just not appropriate.” So I bought myself a new one.

I will never forget going to that first meeting. I had in my hand my NEW copy of the ARP. I decided to approach this one with new eyes and when it talked about addiction, I would insert, character weakness, trial, hardship, something that I was in need of help with. Hurt, pain, anger, pride... the list goes on. I tried to be inconspicuous with my manual as I entered the building. The meetings were held in a

seminary building, this one was in Orem, Utah. I was directed to an empty room, I was early and was the first one there. Not long after that another woman came in the room, looking just as lost and scared as I felt. I knew we were there for the same reasons. I introduced myself and we started talking. She had been serving as a missionary in the addiction recovery program for 2 years, but the night before discovered her husband's pornography addiction. She showed me her book, all worn, highlighted, notes in all the right places and even more in the margins. I was impressed! I didn't see any angry notes!

Shortly after this, the room filled with sisters. We started with a prayer and there is a very specific script that is read by the Missionary who is also called a Group Leader. It is made very clear that anonymity of all concerned is to be protected. We were invited to introduce ourselves by our first name only and then the group would say, "Welcome Susan" or Amy or Heidi or whomever. It would be great luck to start on step 1 because you just jump in on whatever step the group is on. We then read the step, taking turns around the room, but if we were to not feel like reading we can pass and listen only. After this another sister gives a message and she is a facilitator. A facilitator is someone who is in good recovery herself. Someone on my same path. Her being there gave me an added level of comfort. She shared a message relating to the step that we were on and to her personal recovery. Then the time was opened up for sharing. Sharing is where you are given a couple of minutes to say what is in your heart. We are encouraged to talk about things relating to the step that the group is on that night or on the step that we are on in our personal recoveries. There is no need to share and it is perfectly acceptable to pass. There is no cross talk in sharing. You are not interrupted or commented on, the time is yours and yours alone. When the sharing finishes the Group Leader gives a final message, we have a prayer and we're done.

But I didn't want to leave. The spirit was so strong! I was among friends! Friends that knew what I was going through without my having to explain. I was safe. I had a greater understanding of the song, As Sisters in Zion! I better understood scripture I memorized Years ago: Mourn with those who mourn, comfort those who stand in need of comfort, stand as a witness of God! At All times and in All things...
Mosiah 18:9

I continued to go to 3 groups a week. Each group has its own personality and each is worthwhile. When we returned to Ohio I no longer had a group to attend. It took about a year and then our stake started a group. In the mean time I continued in counseling and taking myself through the steps, reading articles and books and following the counsel of my bishop.

In July of last year the church introduced a new manual designed specifically for spouses and family members of addicts. Right now it is only online but it also has links to click on that take you to talks, scriptures and even videos. It is user friendly and really speaks to the soul of the spouse and family members of the addict. This program runs a little bit differently, giving the option for group discussion after sections.

Here we are, back at forgiveness. Now, forgiveness is not easy, it is not an event and it is not quick. It is a process. Early on in this Jeff asked for my forgiveness. Well, I gave it to him and then I took it back. I knew that I wanted to forgive him, but I just wasn't there yet. D&C 64:9-10 says,

9 “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. 10 “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”

I felt like a horrible person and I thought what a rotten trick that I wasn't even the one that did this and now the greater sin is mine? Well, that's a lot of pressure for someone who has just been hit by a train. I think I felt a lot more like Mr. Filch in Harry Potter where he said, “I want to see some punishment!” Thankfully verse 11 and words of latter-day prophets provide some understanding and help here. First, verse 11 says,

“And ye ought to say in your hearts – let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee accordingly to thy deeds.”

The pressure is off! I do not need to issue justice and the judgment is not mine. The demands of justice will be met. Forgiving Jeff is for me more than it is for him. It did not come quick, in fact, it came in portions and it continues today.

President James E. Faust shared some wise counsel from a bishop to a sister who had been through a painful divorce. She said that she knew she was obligated to forgive and she wanted to, but that it was something that she felt incapable of. Her bishop said to her, “Keep a place in your heart for forgiveness, and when it comes, welcome it in.” James E. Faust Ensign, November 2001

In the book, “Lord I Believe Help Thou Mine Unbelief”, Rod Jeppsen says, “Forgiveness may be a difficult word to hear right now. You may not be ready to deal with it for a while. That's ok. Only you can determine when you are ready. Keep in mind there is no time limit. Try not to feel guilty because you have not had feelings of forgiveness yet, but please keep a small corner of your heart open to the idea. All you need is a place to begin.”

There is something miraculous about keeping that small corner of our hearts open. We've been taught this lesson before. The Lord compared faith to a mustard

seed how something so small can grow into something mighty and even give refuge to others.

James E. Faust said:

“All of us benefit from the transcendent blessings of the Atonement and the Resurrection, through which the divine healing process can work in our lives. The hurt can be replaced by the joy the Savior promised....Blessings denied in this life will be fully recompensed in the eternities... Heartaches can be healed, and we can come to know a soul-satisfying joy and happiness beyond our dreams and expectations.” James E. Faust Ensign, November 1996

Another friend who had been through something similar gave me a precious wall hanging with the beautiful poem, A Bend in the Road by Helen Steiner Rice. It goes as follows:

A BEND IN THE ROAD

When we feel we have nothing left to give and we are sure that the song has ended
When our day seems over and the shadows fall and the darkness of night has
descended

Where can we go to find the strength to valiantly keep on trying
Where can we find the hand that will dry the tears that the heart is crying

There's but one place to go and that is to God and dropping all pretense and pride
We can pour out our problems without restraint and gain strength with Him at our side
And together we stand at life's crossroads and view what we think is the end
But God has a much bigger vision and He tells us it's only a bend

For the road goes on and is smoother and the pause in the song is a rest
And the part that's unsung and unfinished is the sweetest and richest and best
So rest and relax and grow stronger, let go and let God share your load
Your work is not finished or ended you've just come to a bend in the road

Helen Steiner Rice

The imagery of the path continuing instead of abruptly ending is hopeful and realistic. My life is different, I call things my “new normal”. I don't think we ever get back to what we thought of as normal before, and truthfully I wouldn't want to because that is when I had a fully addicted

husband. Today he is in full fellowship in the church, is serving in our branch presidency and is leading an Addiction Recovery Group. The 12 step program has been a life line for both Jeff and I. The beauty of this program is it isn't 12 steps and done, it is 12 steps and start over. It is truly a spiritual cleansing.

I did not think that I could feel for my husband what I feel for him now. I didn't think that I could ever respect him, I didn't think that I could ever love him, I didn't even think that I would want him as a friend. But I love him and I am so grateful for him. The biggest miracle that I have received didn't happen in him, it happened in me. It happened in my heart and continues to happen as I experience more and more recovery. Repentance is real. Forgiveness is real and it is only in and through the power of the Atonement. Only because of the love and through the sacrifice of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I have this poem hanging on the kitchen wall of my home. In my mind I change the last stanza just a touch:

Take courage, have hope and grow stronger
Let go and let God share your load.
Your journey's not finished or ended.
It's only a bend in the road.

There are many questions surrounding this topic. Most of which may be uncomfortable to ask. With this understanding, we are providing a safe and COMPLETELY ANONYMOUS way for which to ask anything regarding this issue or the Addiction Recovery Program groups.

Below are the steps of how to use this:

Go to www.gmail.com

Enter username: armsofhislove@gmail.com

Password: **ldswomen** (of course this is for men that have questions too-Jeff will respond to these)

From here you can send an email to sjackson2835@gmail.com and Jeff or I will address your question. If we do not have the answer, we'll do our best to find it. The email reply will go back to

armsofhislove@gmail.com so in order to retrieve your answer you will need to re-visit the Gmail site. If you would like to email us your questions or concerns directly you are welcome to do that as well.

Your “sent” message will be visible on the site. However, it will still be completely anonymous. If you do not wish it to be seen, you can delete your message from the “sent” folder. Any messages left on the site can be a great blessing to others who are facing the affects of addiction.

All direct emails and other communications will be kept confidential.

******I also have a large list of resources. If you are interested, please email me directly and I will send them to you.******

Sjackson2835@gmail.com