

# Formal First Step (Annotated)

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About six months ago, my life came crashing down. What I had tried to keep hidden for over two years finally overtook me and became exposed. I was terrified of the exposure and felt panic and despair like never before. Even though it could no longer be hidden, I still was desperately trying to find an explanation, a way to get out of it, a lie to hide behind.

Intro

What happened 2 years ago was that my lustful behaviors of pornography and masturbation that had been private and relatively under control since I was a teenager, became external in acting out. In looking back, I realize that I had been pursuing the comfort and pleasure of masturbation since I was about 10 years old. Even before I was physically able to, I found pleasurable feelings when I did certain things. I never spoke about this to anyone; never asked anyone any questions, so I kept it entirely in my own hidden world. As I matured, I practiced masturbation every day and sometimes several times a day. I did so pretty much every time I had an opportunity which was when I was alone and naked such as when I was taking a shower, getting dressed, or in bed. As I began to hear other information about sex, I would fantasize about experiences I never thought I would have. This continued through high school and college with no real change.

But I considered my actions to be under control and that they were not hurting anyone. I did not feel out of control or obsessive. I felt like I was on a regular or routine maintenance program in which my sexual needs were being addressed by my masturbation.

After college, I got married and I thought that my need of masturbation would go away. I would finally get to experience all the amazing things I had dreamed about, fantasized about, and heard described. But for me, a physical relationship turned out to be much more complex than I expected as it involved more than just bodies. The emotions, attitudes, and things like fear, anxiety, and resentment of both participants came into the picture as well. It wasn't long before I found myself asking my old friend masturbation to meet my needs again. It seemed to keep me from getting frustrated, so I rationalized that it was a good thing.

Then three things happened that changed the environment in my private world of lust. The internet and all that it made available became a reality. I had never really had much exposure to pornography growing up. I literally remember the two times when it appeared in my life. The first time was when I was around 10 when someone found a discarded magazine and was passing it around. I didn't know that kind of thing existed and I found it fascinating and exciting. I can see the pictures in my mind to this day. The second time was around 14 when some buddies and I found a box of discarded magazines in a dumpster. We split up the stash and we each took a few home with us to hide. I never had the courage to walk into a 7-11 and buy a magazine, so I never did. But when it became available to me on my computer, a whole new world opened up. I became more and more drawn to spending more and more time viewing porn. I was becoming addicted. I found that all I wanted was to search for and find pictures and videos. I would often stay up way too late in the night, like 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, as that was the only time I could be alone with the computer. I noticed that at first I became aroused and would masturbate, but after a while, that didn't seem to meet the release of sexual excitement that I wanted. I found that I still wanted more and more and was satisfied less and less. The only time I stopped was when I absolutely had to in order to get a few hours of sleep as I had to go to work in the morning. I realized that this was becoming a habit that was not good. I knew I could not keep it up. Through determination and self-preservation, I backed off and reduced my pornography addiction to every once in a while, which left the lust smoldering just under the surface.

#1

Behavior

Result

Background

Progression



Progression of Powerlessness

Then the second thing happened. Through some circumstances that I didn't plan or seek out, I found myself in a situation where I could choose to take my fantasies into the real world with a real person. It was a scenario where no one needed to find out. There was a lot of conflict in my mind about all of the barriers, standards, vows, I would be breaking and the lines I would be crossing. I wrestled for 2 weeks arguing with myself and feeling the pull of lust and desire as the arguments of why I shouldn't got weaker and weaker. And then, I made my choice and pursued a sexual relationship.

#2  
Behavior

At first, the payoff was amazing. It was much more exciting than masturbation, and way more exciting than pornography. There was not only sexual release, but there was excitement, danger, and risk which were powerful additions that became almost as intoxicating as the sex. The anticipation of each encounter would take me to an amped up sexual excitement that I experienced again and again. After a while, the anticipation beforehand was greater than the experience itself. Dissatisfaction started setting in and I wanted more. So I moved on in pursuit of more excitement. I started looking for sexual encounters online and starting bouncing from encounter to encounter. After a while, the names and faces started blurring. Eventually, the names didn't matter.

Result

I was now pursuing the satisfaction of my lust almost every waking hour. I was using apps on my phone to post interest with potential sex partners and would set up meetings all day long. I would leave for work early in order to meet someone for sex. I would make a sexual encounter over lunch. I would leave work early to meet someone. I would even make fake off-site appointments in my day that I would use to meet someone. I would spend hours of my work day texting on my phone with various contacts trying to arrange the next meeting. If I was forced to pay attention and focus like in a long meeting, I found that I was bored out of my mind and restless. I often wanted to pull my phone out and check messages, but knew that was not a good idea.

I was very careful at first and made sure nobody noticed my texting or web surfing. But as it progressed, I became more and more careless and I became more and more desperate. I would check messages at the dinner table, I would reply while watching TV in the evening. One time I confirmed a sexual encounter while sitting in church. My pursuit of my addiction to lust was engulfing my life. But I thought it was better than boredom.

Then the third thing happened. My wife had to go take care of her mother in Pennsylvania for 6 weeks. I would be alone. I felt like I had been given freedom to pursue whatever I wanted. I got more and more excited as the day drew near. And when the day came, I pursued my lust every single day. I spent entire nights away from home. I increased my contacts and lined up sexual encounter after sexual encounter. One day, I was shocked to realize that I had had 4 sexual encounters with four different people in one day. I began to realize that I was out of control. I was being pulled down a road that I now realize was dangerous and deceptive. I wanted more and more, but it satisfied less and less.

#3  
Behavior

Unman.

I resolved that I had to quit. I knew it wasn't right. I knew it was hurting me. I knew that it was stupid and risky. So I decided that when my wife returned, I would give up all my activities. I notified all my contacts what I was doing. I was surprised that there was support and encouragement. They knew I was doing the right thing and wished me well. I was intending to quit, but did not intend on saying anything to my wife nor to anybody else.

Result

For the first 3 weeks or so, there was a feeling of relief as the intensity of my pursuits started fading. I used to check my phone every 2 minutes before, but it was silent now. But the reality of everyday life was not able to compete with the excitement from before. However, I was



Unmanageability

determined to stick it out and hoped the cravings would stop. They didn't. They grew worse and worse. It got to the point that I couldn't think about anything else. I feared I would do something really crazy and be found out. I felt that I needed to give myself an outlet to let off steam to keep things under control. So I began seeking out a limited number of sexual encounters. I tried to manage and control it so that I wouldn't spin out of control again. But it slowly ramped up and after a few months, I was operating at nearly the same speed. I was seeking contacts every day and arranging sexual encounters 2 or 3 times a week.

Result

Then my carelessness caught up with me. I accepted a video chat one night thinking that my wife had gone to bed. But she had stayed at the bottom of the stairs and overheard the entire conversation. At the conclusion of the call, all she said was "I think we need to talk." The dread and sheer terror of being discovered nearly made me sick. But I thought this might be the ticket to getting out of this rat race. So I confessed everything to my wife. We spent a lot of time talking, crying, and talking some more. I collaborated with whatever she wanted me to do. I changed my cell phone number, got tested, erased all my email contacts. Except for one thing. She asked that I talk with someone and get some help. But I didn't. She said that she would not say anything so I held on to that and tried to keep the façade and charade of my tattered life intact.

Caught #1

This time I was able to keep things going almost 3 months. The shock and sorrow of being discovered did work for a while. But as things started returning to normal, I felt the familiar cravings creeping back into my mind. I could not find a way to tame this monster inside me. I was very scared that it would push me to do something stupid and nearly did several times. I resolved that I had to resume sexual activity in order to control the urges. But this time I knew I had to be extremely careful. There might not be a 2nd chance. So I looked very carefully for just the right situation that would provide a minimal amount of risk that would provide me with a sexual outlet. I tried to avoid any mistakes or carelessness from the 1st discovery. I found a situation that seemed to work well as far as schedule and proximity. That continued for several months with encounters once a week. I thought maybe I had found a formula that would keep me sane and not acting out more than I could handle. But soon the dissatisfaction crept in and made me start looking for more excitement, new contacts, new encounters. I began looking on Craigslist and looking for anonymous contacts and hookups. I knew it was risky, dangerous, and stupid. But every time I got a reply, or a question, or a request for a picture, I was hooked and would pursue it. This went on for several weeks. But sometimes, people reply after working hours which would be a dangerous time for me to reply. But I wanted to. And when they asked for an X-rated picture, I was excited to comply.

Behavior

Result

Crisis

But then the last thing happened that brought me to this room. A few minutes later I was replying to a group email from my church and somehow the picture I had sent earlier got onto my reply. It went to the entire group. I didn't even know it until someone texted me and let me know. I went into total panic. I couldn't breathe. I raced up to my computer and deleted everything. I deleted everything from my phone. My mind was racing trying to come up with a valid excuse or explanation. I thought the claim of a virus on my phone was sort of reasonable, but I work in IT and it sounded bogus to me. I got a call from the leader of our group. All he asked was "What's up?" and I finally gave up trying to cover up things that I had been hiding for 30 years. So I told him.

Caught #2

Resolution

A few weeks later after a meeting with my church leaders, I began the process of finding help. I began the process of finding and attending my first SA meeting. I was scared, petrified to be exact, and didn't know what to expect. I had been given the number of someone who had offered to talk to people like me. So I called and was surprised when someone answered on the first ring. I explained who I was, how I had gotten his number, and had no idea what would come next. What happened was that he started talking and explaining and reassuring and



## Resolution

answering my questions. I have never felt such an intentional support from somebody I have never even met. I was overwhelmed and greatly encouraged. I purposed to go to the next meeting, swallow my fear and see what happens. The next Monday, I texted my first contact that I was going. When I drove up to the First Baptist of West Columbia, there weren't any cars. And then somebody drove up (rather quickly in my opinion) and parked a few spots away. I got out but had no idea what to do. He hollered "You here for a meeting?" In that instant I realized that my first contact had texted someone and had given them a heads up that a "newbie" was coming to his first meeting. I was overwhelmed again at the kindness and dedication to my support and encouragement. And this rather large, boisterous fellow had dropped everything at his office and scurried over to make sure someone met me. I have since found the same caring heart all over this fellowship and am grateful for the environment that you have provided me to learn, understand, heal, share, reach out, and for the first time, be the "real" me in front of you, as we work the steps, together. I will never be the same.