

# Ep #384: Overcoming Sex and Pornography Addiction with Jason Portnoy



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 384, Overcoming Sex and Pornography Addiction with Jason Portnoy

Did you know that you can live a life that's even better than happy? My name is Jody Moore. I'm a master certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And if you're willing to go with me I can show you how. Let's go.

Hey everybody. I'm so excited about today's episode. We've been working on it for a while and I'm really excited to share it with you. Before I tell you what it's about, I want to make sure that you know that we have every year, at the end of the year, we offer an amazing Christmas gift that you can give to your loved ones.

If you want to genuinely make them happy, then you've got to help them figure out how to find happiness. Not just buy them something that will be fun for a minute and then they'll forget about and toss aside. And that is what we do in Be Bold.

If you want to give a one-year membership to Be Bold as a Christmas gift, I promise that whoever you give it to will thank you, will not be able to thank you actually enough, if they show up and they apply what we teach.

So you can head to [jodymoore.com/gift](http://jodymoore.com/gift) and grab your annual pass. It's all set up so that it will get activated right after Christmas, so we won't ruin the surprise. You'll also get a little booklet in the mail that has a bunch of illustrations and thoughts and content that I teach. So you'll have something fun to wrap up and give them, along with the letter you'll print out, explain that you got them an annual membership to Be Bold.

So again, head to [jodymoore.com/gift](http://jodymoore.com/gift) for all the details and to sign up. And now that we got that out of the way, I want to tell you that I first became aware of Jason and his story through Bill Turnbull at Faith Matters. He reached out to me and said, "Hey, did you hear this guy's story?"

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Jason is a recovering sex and pornography addict and he wrote a book telling his story and a part of his story is the critical role that his life coach has played in helping him to get pointed even in the right direction and then to take accountability, and to be able to get some leverage over himself.

So of course, this was a story for many reasons that I was very interested in interviewing Jason about. Faith Matters really wanted to as well. And so I'm really grateful that I was able to partner with Faith Matters for this interview. You're going to hear Tim Chaves from Faith Matters and myself interviewing Jason.

And obviously, if you struggle with sex or pornography addiction, this will be really insightful to you. But even if you don't, I highly recommend first of all Jason's book, Silicon Valley Porn Star. And second of all, this episode, you're going to find so many gems because the humanness that leads to these challenges, the struggle to understand who we are, to feel good about ourselves, to leverage ourselves to be able to behave in the way that we want to, all of it is so relatable and real.

So without further ado, here is my discussion with Tim and Jason. Let's go.

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Jody: Alright, so let's start with Jason, welcome, thanks for joining us here on Faith Matters and Better Than Happy. And Tim, I'm happy to be co-hosting this episode with you today. Let's begin. We're going to tell your story as we go throughout the episode today, Jason, but why don't you give us just the cocktail party version introduction of who you are if you wouldn't mind?

Jason: Sure. So well without waiting into the story I guess, my name is Jason Portnoy. I grew up in New Jersey, went to college in Colorado and then in California, and then I went out to Silicon Valley. Got out to Silicon Valley at the start of the first .com boom and had a career there in Silicon Valley, got to work with some really amazing people and some really amazing companies.

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And then about 11 years ago, moved to Utah and started working as a venture capitalist, and that's what I've been doing. Through all that, I had a very interesting journey, which we'll get into. And a few years ago, I decided to write a book about that journey because I thought it could be helpful for people. And that's kind of I think what we're talking about today.

Tim: Jason, I think one of the most interesting things is that you had this amazing career, amazing journey. There's this external version of Jason that is super successful and everything's thriving, but on the other side, as you sort of alluded to, there was something else going on below the surface that was really different. Would you mind sort of introducing us to what was going on there, which is really the topic of your book?

Jason: Yeah, sure. So at some point, when I was in college and I got my first laptop with an internet connection, albeit a slow internet connection, I discovered online pornography. And started to look at porn, felt like this is just what guys do. It was interesting, exciting, and over the years, it kind of developed into - definitely into a habit.

For me, it started to also go to the next stages, which were Craigslist hookups, and then there were escort websites, and all of this was happening while I was dating and then engaged and then getting married and then having our first child. So all of this was going on.

I had my career was going well, my family life was going well, everything on the surface seemed like it was fine. But below the surface, all this other stuff was happening and that was challenging.

Jody: I just want to say, I know Tim and I both feel really appreciative of your willingness to write this book, which is an amazing book by the way. The book is called, like you said, Silicon Valley Porn Star, and it is, even for somebody who doesn't look at pornography or have that particular challenge, it's an amazing and vulnerable and really well-written description of your experience.

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And so much I think that we can all relate to in terms of having our outward appearance versus what's happening internally, and just how that affects relationships and the way that you navigated that. So I just want to thank you for that and for your willingness to be here today and share about this vulnerable topic.

Jason: Thanks for saying that Jody. Sorry to interrupt, but I also want to say I think that some people fear that - I feel like sometimes I have to say there's nothing pornographic in the book. It's a story about issues that I had that kind of surfaced and the name porn star comes from the work that I was doing with a life coach at the time. It was the nickname that we gave to this part of myself and I had been working in Silicon Valley. And so that's what the title means, but I just want people not to worry. There's nothing pornographic in the book. It's just a good story.

Jody: Yes, excellent. Thank for you clarifying that. Should we kind of dive in a little bit? I think it's a little bit relevant to share just a few of the struggles that you experienced as a child, some of the decisions that maybe especially your dad made.

And we all experience trials as children, but I think some of those, like not having a father around as much as you might have liked and things may have contributed to your struggle of figuring out your masculinity and feeling somewhat of a void. Would you mind speaking just a little bit to some of that?

Jason: Yeah absolutely. So kind of talked about I found pornography when I was young and then it kind of escalated into real-world hookups and things like that. And once I started working on that and going deeper into that with a life coach many years later and trying to understand what was driving that, what was I really seeking?

It wasn't about the sex. It was about maybe connection, or looking for love, or something. I needed something from the outside world, and why did I need that? And we kind of methodically started going back through my past

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and through my childhood and trying to identify if there were things that may have contributed to that.

And certainly, when we touched - the first time we touched my kind of memory of when my dad moved away, I just remember bawling in that session. And I had been carrying that around, I was in my mid-30s by then, and I had been carrying that around for, I don't know, 30 years almost.

Jody: How old were you when your dad moved away?

Jason: Five or six. That was really fascinating. It was like, oh my gosh, I had no idea that was even buried in there. What else is buried in there? And that kind of - because also, you can't just get there in your head. You can't just think your way into what was the experience and how did it affect me. It doesn't work analytically like that, at least in my experience.

It's more about getting yourself into a place where you can start to feel those feelings again, and feel those emotions again. So then there were other moments later in my coaching where I realized my mother, when I was in fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade-ish, got into a really bad depression.

And she was either heavily medicated or would go away to hospitals. And if she was home and she was medicated, she kind of was there but not quite there. And so she became kind of emotionally very distant and those were again, very formative years in my childhood, kind of middle school, early high school.

And my mom kind of left during those years. And that also really affected me. But again, not something I really understood until later when I'm kind of going through life, playing off of some script that I have in my head, and I start bumping up against the limitations of that script. And then starting to ask the questions, hey, why? Why is that happening?

Tim: And I want to ask a little - just to clarify a little bit that potentially, part of this is not about the sex but it's seeking for love and connection. But

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earlier you also mentioned that as all of this was going on, you were engaged and then you were married and then you had a child. And so, superficially conflict there, saying well, he's got all this love and connection in his family, but there's still this unmet need.

So what have you discovered about what was really going on and has there been additional love and connection that you needed in order to replace the unwanted pornography use?

Jason: That is such a great question Tim. I feel like yes, I did have a very loving wife and girlfriend, then fiancé, then wife. I think that what I learned through my journey, because it wasn't just the porn stuff and the sex stuff. For me, it was also kind of money and cars, and I talk about this in the book, that I thought if I had money, fancy cars, and women, I would be happy.

And what I learned was that I could have never had enough of any of those things. So it didn't matter if I had a loving wife, I still would have gone out looking for love in the wrong places I guess. And no matter how many of those encounters I would have had, it would have never been enough, partly because I was trying to use things from the outside world to fill something inside of myself, which just doesn't work.

But the second order of effect is that every time I engaged in those things, I felt guilty and I felt ashamed and I felt embarrassed. And eventually, I felt out of control. And to cover up those feelings and avoid feeling them or distract myself from them, I just did more of that thing and that's when at the very end when I kind of hit my rock bottom moment is when it really turned into an addiction, where I was just out of control and couldn't stop. And that's kind of the journey that I take the reader through in the book too.

Jody: I love that question too Tim, and I just want to ask you kind of a follow up. It almost sounds like what you were really seeking, because we do often say we want to feel love and connection, right? And we think that

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comes from someone else. If I have a girlfriend or a wife or a husband or whatever, then I'm going to feel loved.

But one of the things I always teach is that we don't feel other people's love. Love is an emotion we feel in our body, and if I choose to think, "Oh, she loves me, he loves me, I must be lovable, I must be okay, I must not be as bad or damaged or broken as I tend to think of myself," then we feel that.

And so to your point, there was no amount of money, or success, or women, or anything that could fill that void. There's not even I don't think an amount of other people loving you that can fill that void within us unless you choose to believe it's true, I must be alright, I'm good enough, right?

Jason: That's right. And later in my journey and the coaching and I read lots of books, I watched movies, I kind of did everything I could to try to work on myself and climb my mountain and heal, et cetera. But this concept of shame became an important part of that journey as well.

I remember the first time I watched a Brené Brown YouTube video about shame and all these alarm bells were going off in my head like, "Yes, that's me, that's my life." And if a child is - I feel like this isn't as controversial today to say as it may have been in the past, but if a child is abandoned, and I don't know that I was abandoned. I want to be really clear. I don't think I was quite abandoned.

But my dad moved far away and I didn't see him much, and my mom went into her depression. To a child, that feels like abandonment. Even though in their brain and intellectually they can rationalize it, but the emotion and the feeling. And the core of the shame feeling is that I don't deserve love, I'm not worthy of being loved.

And so Jody, you're exactly right. So here I am looking for love everywhere, but I was never going to find it because fundamentally, I didn't believe that I actually deserved to be loved. And I feel like I had to get to a place where I loved myself. And that was very hard because I had to accept all of the



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things that I had done that I felt very ashamed of and very embarrassed by and very guilty about, and I had to be honest about those things. And I had to forgive myself, and that was a really difficult process.

Tim: I want to ask you more about guilt and shame specifically, and I love Brené Brown's way of thinking about that. I think it's super healthy and helpful. And we had mentioned earlier that many of our listeners, both on Faith Matters and Better Than Happy are Latter Day Saints, and within our faith tradition, there is a very strong ongoing injunction against pornography use, which I think in a lot of ways is very helpful and positive. And I don't need you to answer this question in any way in a Latter Day Saints context.

Jason: Well, I will just interject. I agree with that. I think after everything I've been through and everything I've learned, I think porn is bad. We are exploiting these men and women, mostly women, I don't think it's healthy for us at all as humans.

Tim: Any other problems you see? Is it just the exploitation or what other problems do you see with porn?

Jason: Well, that's the one. The two biggest ones that I always highlight are number one, the exploitation, which disproportionately affects women. And number two, most men who are mostly the consumers of porn are lying about their porn consumptions. So they're looking at porn, and they're probably lying about it. And if you're doing that, you're not in your integrity, and that's when everything starts to break down.

Tim: I would love to sort of look at the evolution of those feelings that you had. When you first started consuming pornography, was there something inherent in you that brought in feelings of guilt and shame? Or was it just interesting and you were curious and then it was sort of the later misalignment with what you felt were your growing values of family and love and connection that brought on those feelings of guilt?

Jason: Another amazing question. I feel like it was from the very first minute. I actually write the scene in the book. I kind of stumble into some

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porn. It's a long time ago and I don't remember exact details, but I find myself looking at porn. And one of the first things I do is turn around to make sure that the door to my bedroom is closed and locked so that one of my roommates doesn't come in. So immediately, I knew or felt, or somehow had a sense I shouldn't be doing this. Whether I should have or not, I just had that feeling.

Jody: Yeah, I think that's so fascinating because having not been raised yourself like the way Tim and I were, where we were taught, hey, stay away from porn, I'm fascinated by that innate part of us. Within our faith tradition, we call it the Light of Christ, or the Spirit, and some people call it intuition or the universe or whatever you want to call it.

I do think there's a compass within us that sometimes gets misinformed by our habits and things, but that does speak to us about what serves us ultimately in the end. And I'm curious too, and like you said, you've studied and you've done so much work on yourself, your mind, your heart, your relationship, Anne Marie, your wife, which we should talk about in a moment.

But do you consider yourself a spiritual person today? And if so, what does that look like and what kind of spirituality - because when I read your book, it sounded very spiritual to me the way you live your life today.

Jason: Yes. I do consider ourselves a very spiritual family. We don't have any specific religious affiliations. I was raised in a Catholic household, although interestingly, my mother, my biological mother was Catholic and my biological father was Jewish. And I was raised in a Catholic household. As I got older and I started to get closer to my dad, probably college and post-college, I started to learn much more about his side of the family and his traditions.

So we have two kids, one 13, one six, and we've been trying to raise them in a house that is spiritual and appreciates all of the different religions. We talk about all of it at home so that the kids feel well informed and respect

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that there are different religions, people have different beliefs. But at the end of the day, in our opinion, they're all pointing to the same place, or to a very similar place.

So yes, it has become very spiritual. And we talk a lot about dark and light in our house. And I would talk about pornography for me was a portal into the dark. And it started to take hold of me and pull me in, and I feel like that's kind of what the dark does. It tries to pull you away from the light.

Whatever that light is to you, like you said Jody, you can call it whatever you want. We do believe that there is this dichotomy and it's much better to stay in the light.

Tim: That's really beautiful and it resonates really strongly with me because part of my spiritual journey has been going through what we might call faith crises, where you sort of have this very specific belief system and then for whatever reason, it breaks down over the course of time. A lot of people refer to this as deconstruction.

And in my deepest moments of deconstruction, where I don't know anything, none of my previous beliefs are working for me, what started specifically for me a period of reconstruction was that exact same concept, where it became clear to me that no matter how rational I wanted to get with trying to be right about my beliefs, it remained clear to me that there was always a right and wrong.

There was always good and evil, there was always light and dark. And that actually was the first step for me on reconstructing some sort of spirituality. And I find myself today in a very, very similar spiritual place that you are, where I do consider myself to be a very spiritual person, and I look at faith traditions and wisdom traditions all around me and say, really at the end of the day, it does seem like we're pointing in the same direction.

Jason: I feel like this is part of the entire point of us being on this planet Earth, going through this earthly experience. Our soul is continually trying to move toward the light. If you look at consciousness over the longest

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timespan, before the universe didn't exist, maybe the Big Bang, whatever you want to call it, then there's Earth, then there's amino acids, then there's single-celled life, then there's multi-celled life, and then there's us, and then there's ascensions, and then there's consciousness, and now we're trying to elevate our consciousness.

We are trying to move. The grand plan is moving towards higher consciousness, which I translate as more light. And that's kind of the whole point for all of us to be here. And so our souls get there in different ways. My soul had to go through this experience of the porn and the sex stuff and healing traumas, et cetera, for me to get to that place. Your journey would have been different.

Everyone's journey is a little bit different, but at the end of the day, I think we're all striving for the same thing. Someone used this analogy to me once about a year ago and I love it. She basically said we're all like plants. We all just want to bend towards the light. That's kind of this subtle pressure that's constantly inside of us is to bend us in that direction.

Tim: That's beautiful.

Jody: That is beautiful. I think our listeners probably have a whole bunch of questions because Tim and I both read your book and know your story, but I just want to make sure we fill in some of the gaps. Highly recommend reading the book, but...

Jason: It's a fast read too.

Jody: So your wife Anne Marie, who, like you mentioned, was your girlfriend when this first started and you were with her throughout this journey. She didn't know about this when the two of you were married, is that correct?

Jason: Correct.

Jody: If I'm getting some of the facts wrong just...

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Jason: No, it's okay.

Jody: And so at some point though, it became apparent to you that your marriage wasn't going to continue the way you wanted if you didn't start...

Jason: Yeah, and Jody if you want, I can jump in and kind of roll it forward.

Jody: Please do. Walk us through that part.

Jason: So I'm having this career in Silicon Valley, I'm making lots of money. I have these great titles, I buy a fancy car...

Jody: Let me interrupt you real quick. Silicon Valley, you were really one of the key founders - I don't know if founder is the real word, but key players in starting PayPal. Is that correct?

Jason: Yes. I was not a founder technically.

Jody: Not a founder, sorry.

Jason: Employee number 34, which compared to the size of the company today feels like a founder.

Jody: Exactly. Anyway, I just wanted to throw that in.

Jason: No, that's okay. Well, and people like to hear these stories too. I got to work very closely with Peter Thiel, with Elon Musk, with Reid Hoffman, who went on to start LinkedIn, with Steven Chen who started YouTube, with Jeremy who started Yelp. The list just goes on. It was a really fascinating time to be in Silicon Valley and I got to work with some really amazing people and learn from them.

So all of this again, you're just making this point, on the surface, it's amazing. This looks amazing. But under the surface, I am essentially cheating repeatedly, habitually, chronically, compulsively, whatever word you want to use. I can't seem to stop cheating on my girlfriend who then becomes my fiancé, who then becomes my wife.

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And at some point, about four or five years after we were married, we have our first daughter, and I'm just in a downward spiral. At that point, I started to realize I have a problem. I didn't know what to do about it. I was like, I have a problem.

And so I quit my job because I felt like it was either stay at the company or get divorced, and I really wanted to try to make things work. I didn't tell my wife Anne Marie about anything I had been doing. About six months after I quit my job, we still weren't making progress getting back together. We had some therapists in the mix that were helping us, et cetera.

And I found out that she had been having an affair, and it had been going on for a year. And that was crazy devastating. I found this life coach and...

Jody: Wait, can I interrupt you for just a minute? Do you mind if I read this one paragraph? Because when I read this, of course as a life coach, I was like, I'm just - everyone needs to hear this. So this is the point at which this life coach is recommended to you by somebody.

Jason: By my assistant, my executive assistant at the office because she is working closely with me and can tell that I am not well. She can tell I'm just in some downward spiral and one day she's like, "Are you okay?"

Jody: And did she say to you, "You should go see this life coach," or did she just say, "I know somebody that you should talk to?" What did you think you were walking into?

Jason: Well, she says, "I know this woman who helps people in times of crisis or transition and maybe you should talk to her. She's not for everyone, but maybe you should talk to her." And at that point I was like, sure, why not?

Jody: Let's try anything.

Jason: Yeah, I'll try anything.

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Jody: Okay, so this is what you wrote in the book here. It says you walk in the building, it says, "The door at the other side of the room bursts open and a woman emerges. Oh hi, you must be Jason. Yes, hi. I'm awkward and very unsure of myself. Come on, she gestures to me to come into the room. I follow her direction and she closes the door behind us. From that moment forward, my life will never be the same." Okay, say more about what Melissa had done for you.

Jason: The next paragraph or chapter, whatever, I forget exactly how it starts next in the book. But basically, she's like, "So, Julie introduced us. How can I help you?" I'm like, "Well, I just found out my wife's been having an affair," and I just kind of start in with I'm a victim, all of these things are happening to me, I don't know why, and I'm waiting for her sympathy.

Because I've been telling this story to my parents, my friends, everyone, and everyone's like, "Oh, you poor thing." All of that stuff. And I'm eating it up. And this woman is just looking at me like, not giving me any of that sympathy. And then eventually saying, "It feels like you're a victim right now."

And I'm like, "Yes, I am. You got it. Yes, you're right. You're good." And it turns out she's like, "Yeah, no." Essentially, I'll paraphrase. She's like, "I'm not going to let you get away with that." You have created the circumstances in your life. You may have created them - again, I'm paraphrasing and collapsing a few years of things now at this point saying, you have created the conditions for these things to happen in your life.

You may have created them consciously, and of course I'm like, no I didn't, why would I create that for myself? Okay, then you created them subconsciously and there are things working under the surface that you don't really understand. I don't understand them either, but my job is to help you understand them.

And so we're going to go deeper and deeper and deeper into that subconscious, into the feelings, and we're going to start unpacking all of

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this stuff. And that takes us back to where we started earlier in the conversation.

Tim: I actually want to ask Jody at this point if that's what you feel like where it would have gone in the conversation with you. Because I know that one of your core messages - I might even call it radical responsibility. And that seems to be very clear where Melissa went. So Jody, what's going on in your mind when you're hearing this? Is that where you would have taken it?

Jody: So I want to just say that the way I coach sound pretty aligned with the way you've been coached Jason, in terms of like Tim said, giving people responsibility for the outcomes of their lives. But there's a difference between giving someone responsibility and blaming someone.

And I don't know if - it sounded like the way you wrote that story that you - maybe it isn't exactly what you expected to hear or wanted to hear, but you moved into an - we're trying to empower people, right? So if other people, if my spouse or my child or whatever, the government or whoever is the reason that I'm struggling, then I have to try to control those people or these agencies in order to not struggle.

So when we say to someone, "No, you're creating your own struggle," I always follow it up with, "Isn't that the best news ever?" Because we can work on you. You can choose to change you. You may not be able to control your wife or anybody else. But I do want to say that this particular thought of you're not a victim here, I take it on a case by case basis.

It's not to say that no one should ever say I've been victimized. There are times and situations when it might serve you to recognize I've been victimized here. And that thought, "I'm a victim here," might be the very thought necessary to move you into a better situation. In other times, it's a completely disempowering thought. And so it is case specific, but yes, I'm a big fan of - I love all my problems to be my fault because then I feel empowered around them.



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Jason: Yes. I feel like her message was you have created the circumstances in your life for these things to happen, you shouldn't beat yourself up over that, but we should try to understand that and you have agency. And I left that first meeting, I talk about this in the book, I left that first meeting feeling hope, which is a feeling I hadn't felt for many, many months, or maybe longer by that point. And so yes, I would say this kind of concept of radical personal responsibility was a big part of that work.

Tim: Let me ask you too, just before you meet Melissa in the book, was actually one of the weirdest, if I could say that, parts of the book for me because there's this dynamic where you do feel like a victim and you feel so betrayed by what Anne Marie had done, but obviously in the meantime, there was something going on your end, which I think from an external perspective it's like, potentially far more severe.

So how did you get into a headspace where you really did feel like the victim and still not even - I guess I'm just being transparent here, not feel that you needed to confess what you had done?

Jason: I ask myself that question sometimes still. How did I rationalize all of that? The closest I've been able to get to is when I was kind of in the bad behavior, the part of my rationalization was this is what a successful man does. I am entitled to get the things that I want.

And so one detail, it's in the book, but we haven't talked about yet was that post-marriage, there was a disparity in the amount of sex that I wanted versus that Anne Marie wanted in our relationship. And so if she didn't want to have sex, I felt like an entitled man, I should be able to go get sex if that's what I want and need.

That's how I was justifying that for a lot of the time. And then how did I justify not sharing my secrets? Just to interject for a second, the secrets thing, if I had to pick the two pillars of Melissa's thing, and Jody, I know you agree with all this stuff as well, it's the deep levels of personal responsibility and sharing your secrets.

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Because keeping those secrets inside, it's caustic, it makes you sick, you do things to cover up those feelings, et cetera. I didn't understand that back then and I felt like well, I don't have to share these things. I don't have to share what I've done. I can just kind of play the victim and we'll let this thing play out and then this is great because I get to wipe the slate clean and start fresh without ever having to admit to all the bad things I did.

And actually, maybe this is a good time to keep rolling forward a little bit because that's the next leg of the story, which was we go through this period of she had been having an affair, she didn't want to end that relationship, she moved out, we both are getting coached by this life coach Melissa, sometimes together, sometimes separately.

We've given her permission to share our sessions with each other if it's helpful. And we're apart for a while, a year maybe, a year and a half, but we have our daughter who we're sharing time with. And that keeps us together to some degree where we have to do handoffs and coordinate schedule, and then gradually, we start sharing things that we're talking to Melissa about, or insights we might be having about our life.

And eventually, gradually, we do wind up getting back together. Again, I think it takes about a year and a half. And meanwhile, I still haven't shared my secrets. I'm still keeping that stuff inside. And so we kind of are starting over but I haven't done anything to really resolve what was inside of me. And I haven't told Melissa either.

So I still am keeping these secrets and secrets will keep you sick, eventually, I don't remember exactly how long, a year, two years, whatever, I start in with the bad behavior again, and then there's the guilt and then there's the shame, and then I get caught.

And then getting caught is like, doubly devastating for Anne Marie because not only do I admit that these things have been happening all along, for a decade, which is really horrible if you pause to think about that. But I also have to acknowledge that even in that moment where we thought we were

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coming back together, starting fresh, had learned so much, shared our secrets, I still had held back and she really felt at that point like I don't even know who you are. And frankly, I didn't either. And that was a really scary time, and I write about that in the book.

Jody: One of the things that you mentioned, Brené Brown earlier, one of the things she teaches that I think is really helpful and again, even for someone - all of us have I think probably opportunity to be more honest and more vulnerable, especially in our marriages. More open and more connecting.

But Brené Brown teaches that shame grows in hiding. If you want to grow shame, put it in a petri dish and keep it secret. And that's what causes it to grow. And when we look at any of these bad habits, whether it's a pornography, a sex addiction, or just overeating, over-Facebooking, whatever, these things we're like, we should probably cut back on that.

It's fueled by, it comes from us trying to escape feeling bad. I'm feeling bored or I'm feeling bad about myself or I'm feeling stuck, I want to get away from that, I'll just get on to Instagram for a little while, or I'll just go eat a cookie, or I'll look at pornography. In part, that's a portion of it.

And so when we keep it a secret and that shame grows, it only fuels more the compulsion to participate in these activities. And so partly, I mean, there's so much to this idea of being more vulnerable and more honest, but a part of it is that the way to truly heal, not just repress those urges for a year and a half like you did, which is challenging, but to actually heal as much as possible in that way requires vulnerability.

And when you share it out loud with someone, and I would imagine that Melissa was probably - I know she's a key part of this. When you can share it with a neutral person and it would make sense that Anne Marie couldn't serve as that neutral person for you, she's going to be hurt. But when your life coach or a therapist or a church leader, whoever it is doesn't react with disgust or shock or whatever, it pops that shame bubble.

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Jason: Or judgment.

Jody: Or judgment, right. I had an experience where I went to a therapist and had some things in my life I needed to change. I told him everything and I expected him to go, "Wow, this is serious, I don't know how you're going to get out of this." And he said, "I don't think this is a big deal." And I will never forget that feeling. As soon as he just listened to me and watched my cry for an hour and didn't say much at all, and then he just said, "I don't think this is a big deal." And that was such a gift to me.

Jason: That's a great story.

Tim: I really resonate with that too, Jody. And there's a part in the book Jason where you say that Melissa would always repeat to you the truth speeds things up and the truth will set you free. And nothing has ever made that sort of little piece of wisdom, scripture, resonate with me more than reading your book because there is almost this arc of tension that builds and builds and builds as the secrets pile up and the dissonance between what you're projecting and where you're actually at becomes more and more.

So I would love for you to actually maybe talk about that moment where Anne Marie finds out and obviously it wasn't fully your decision there but was there some sense of relief, even in that really, really difficult moment when you were finally confronted with the revealing of your secret?

Jason: Yes 100%. The relief, partly it was tears. I was crying and I was releasing all of this emotion that I had been carrying. And I think what we tend not to realize is how much work and effort it takes to hold all of that stuff in. And it's not just shame and guilt. There's other emotions. There's other things we do, the busyness we all get ourselves into, et cetera, I think we underestimate how difficult it is. It's like you're building a dam to keep it all in. And then, the more that's in there, the stronger the dam has to be. And that dam represents the emotional and psychological energy that it requires from you on a minute-by-minute basis to keep that dam up.

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And as soon as I let the dam break, it was this huge relief and it was very scary. I kind of use the analogy also of falling. It was like the dam broke or the ground opened up underneath me and I started falling. And that was a very, very scary thing until eventually – now again I'm collapsing some months of coaching work. But eventually understanding that what feels like falling, it's like – I'm trying not to get too weird here, but if you're falling in outer space, you're not really falling. You're floating. And that this state of floating is actually our natural state.

We create all of these structures to feel safe. But they're really artificially constructed structures because our natural state is floating. And so, the dam broke, it was a huge relief. It was very scary. I was falling, falling, falling. And the thing that caught me was a 12-step program. And we haven't really talked about that yet, but this was the moment Melissa says, "Maybe you should try a 12-step program." And I...

Jody: And that was designed for sex addiction?

Jason: Yes. Well, I didn't even know that that existed at the time. So, I just went on to Google that night and searched for 12-step program for sex addiction. And boom, up pops – I think there were a couple of different ones. But the one that I saw first was Sexaholics Anonymous.

And I clicked the link and I started reading the website and it was like, you know, we admitted our lives had become unmanageable and I was like, yes, that's me. We had tried to stop but couldn't, yes, that's me. We felt ashamed...

I mean, everything I read was like, that's me, that's me, that's me. Oh my gosh, how did this happen? All this stuff is going through my head. And then the first thing Melissa has me do is to write everything down. Write down every instance.

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And so, Jody, to your point about having a place to share your secrets, it can even be on a piece of paper with yourself, if you're not ready yet to even share it with a therapist or a coach. Even that step, I think, can start the healing. And so, that was the next thing I did, was just wrote everything down.

Jody: I'm curious, Tim, your thoughts on this. Because in our faith tradition, part of our repentance process is to, when appropriate, to share what's going on with a church leader. It's sort of a confession. But I'm curious if maybe, what do you think, Tim? If a portion of that isn't, you need to go confess, like report what you've done, turn yourself in so much as it's for us, like you need to get this out and let the shame start to diffuse itself.

Tim: You know, I actually totally agree with that. And I may even see the purpose of confession in a little bit different of a way than members of our faith. We recently went and visited, in Downtown Salt Lake City, a man called Joseph Grenny who started an organization called The Other Side Academy, where he takes people who have dealt with chronic homelessness, drug use, criminality, and offers them essentially what is a school, a multi-year school where they can come, no tuition, room and board is provided, and the only condition is that they want to change.

And what they have there is a system of sort of radical vulnerability and confession. But they're not confessing to – when they do something wrong, when they slip up, and in a place like this there's obviously no sex allowed. It's like they live a very, very strict and high standard of morality.

And when they slip up, like if somebody steals something or if they're flirting too much with someone or they're violating any of the code of conduct of The Other Side, then they talk about it. And they're called out on it, actually. Every week, they gather in a group where they sit in a circle. It's not across a desk. They will call each other out very transparently but kindly and they will hash things out amongst themselves. And they will also

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confess anything that they've done wrong and get the support of the community.

That's such a healthy dynamic, where they're – the truth really does set all of them free. There's this, when you are vulnerable, I think there's something in other people that makes them want to help us.

Jason: Well, that's what builds connection.

Tim: Yes, exactly. And so, in this particular setting, sharing what can be very shame-filled things with a community, not only do you have one person there to help you, like we often have in our confession system. But you have a whole community of people who are supporting you. So, I think that's really powerful...

Jason: Well that's what that brings to mind, is my experience in the 12-step program. You know, I went into a room full of people who I didn't know and I started – you can call it confessing. You can call it sharing. You can call it whatever you want, really. But I basically just started telling my secrets and how I felt about my secrets and how scared I was or how embarrassed I was, or how ashamed I was.

And then, I listened to the next person do the same thing. And then, I listened to the next person do the same thing. And then, I heard people who had been in the program for a long time and who had kind of climbed out of the really darkest spots and were in a better place, and that was inspiring.

And then, I heard people who were in even darker places, scarier places than I was or had been. And that was also inspiring in a way, in the sense of, of I'm not careful, I can keep getting pulled in deeper. This doesn't have to be my low point. It could be worse. And that was interesting too.

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Tim: You also talked about how, once you got into the 12-step, then you started counting your days of sobriety, not consuming porn, not having sex outside of your marriage and things like that. And it was interesting because you got really attached, in the book, you say to the number of days that you were sober and you'd feel this euphoria when you went for a new record. But then, you'd come crashing down when you slipped up.

And I'm thinking about – because I know there are people listening to this who struggle with unwanted pornography use or potentially even sex addiction. I'm guessing that that feeling of, "I'm doing it, I'm making it, I'm never going to slip up again," and then slipping up and crashing and feeling those huge weights of shame and guilt, I know there are people listening that that's their reality. So, can you talk to that?

Jason: I would attach – I did attach a lot of importance to my number, you know, as I talk about it in the book. And going back to what we talked about a few minutes ago, the dam breaks, I'm falling. I am emotionally raw, like a wound, like this huge wound has been ripped open. I am raw and I am very emotionally volatile.

So, yes, when I make it through a day or two or three or four days or whatever without porn or masturbation, I'm elated. And it feels like, this is amazing, I can start a new life. And it's like I project an entire life ahead of me of what I am now deeming success, and I get this euphoria almost.

And then, a day or two later, if I slip up or whatever you want to call it, act out, all of that future projection would come crashing down and I would start projecting the opposite, "I'll never change. I'll never get out of this." And it turned out that I was just going from plus 10 to minus 10 and it was really tough.

And at one point, when I was in one of those minus 10 moments, on a scale of plus 10 to minus 10, so I was at the bottom, and I called one of my



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sponsors and I said, “I need more help. I’m doing the steps, I think I’m doing this right. But man, I’m struggling.”

And he was like, “Don’t put so much focus on the number. Don’t worry so much about the future. Just worry about today.” And any time your mind starts drifting into next week, or next month, or next year, pull it back to today.

And I had heard these messages before. I had read *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. And that book changed my life. But we hear these things over and over again. We hear, “The truth will set you free,” all the time. But we still don’t take it seriously. Or we just need reminders. And so, he reminded me, stay present and don’t project your entire future plus 10, minus 10, and that was a huge help. That really unlocked it for me.

Jody: It’s such a great lesson for anything we’re doing in life even, when you’re trying to build a business and working with entrepreneurs, and they’re so excited that something worked. I’m nervous because then when something doesn’t work, the opposite’s going to happen. I’m always saying, let’s get off the rollercoaster of, “This is amazing. This is terrible.” Let’s just be on some rolling hills. Like, it is disappointing when it doesn’t work and it is cool when it does work. But we don’t want to be on that rollercoaster. That is unhealthy.

Jason: Yeah, I heard it once said by someone – I have no idea who it was. But it was like, “It’s never as good as you think and it’s never as bad as it seems,” something to that effect. It’s like our mind pushes it to the extremes, when in reality it’s somewhere in between.

Tim: In terms of just practical tips, do you believe that pornography – and maybe this isn’t a public policy question as much as it is for me a parenting question. It’s become a societal norm to hand our kids smartphones,

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computers in their pocket at 11, 12, what do you think society really should look like and parents specifically should look at this issue?

Jason: Well, I know what we've done, which is to put a lot of restrictions on our daughter's phone. Our son is too young to have a phone. But our daughter's phone is restricted in several different ways. One, just aggregate time. Like it turns on at a certain time in the morning and it turns off a certain time at night, so we know that there's hours of the day where she just can't use it at all.

When it is turned on, we have restrictions on the amount of time she can spend on social media and other things like that, so that she's not just getting lost in that stuff. Because it does suck you in. I mean, we're all human and those things are triggering all these very subconscious things in our lizard brain because that's how those people make money.

And then it's also restricted in terms of content. So, we've gone in and set the content restrictions, so it limits adult websites. There are certain websites you definitely can't go on to, et cetera. So, that's the approach that we've taken.

The next thing that we are planning to do is just education. Because I've kind of given up on a policy solution here. I don't even know if it's the government's purview. I don't know. But I don't even want to wade into that because that would just take too long. It's like, we need to do something now. The next step is education.

She's 13 years old. I'm reading a book right now called *Girls and Sex* by Peggy Orenstein. I don't know if you guys have read any of Peggy's stuff. It's very interesting. My wife's going to read it next, then we'll decide if our daughter should read it.

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But this will be the beginning of talking – and pornography is a big topic in the book because it is so accessible. And mostly boys are into it. It's going to have an effect on her because of the way it's affecting boys.

And so yes, I think it saddens me, I guess, that it's so pervasive. But I feel like we, as a culture, are demanding it. And that's why it's there. And so, I'm more focused on, why are we demanding it? And what can we do to reduce the demand for it as opposed to banning it or blocking it or whatever you want to do from that side?

Jody: That's good. I also, again, I know a lot of my listeners are interested in life coaching, or a lot of them are life coaches. I want to make sure and have you just touch on – I know you've benefitted from all kinds of help. A lot of times, I get this question, "How do I know if I should seek out a coach or a therapist?" And I don't expect you to answer that globally. But just on your experience, what has been the difference and what have been maybe the benefits of each or drawbacks of each? And also, I know people are wondering who this mysterious Melissa is. So, if you wouldn't mind speaking to those.

Jason: Yes, she is mysterious. She wants to stay mysterious. I've had a lot of people asking for introductions and she just doesn't want that. She has a very full practice and she's very happy about what's happening, that the things that she taught me are getting channeled through this book and can benefit more people. But she's kind of content to let it stay there.

To the question of, "Should I get a coach or therapist?" it kind of depends on where you put the emphasis in that question. Is it, should I get a coach or therapist, to me, the answer is yes, for everyone. If you put the emphasis later, like should I get a coach OR therapist, I think that's different. And I think that you mentioned earlier, it could be a coach, could be a therapist, it could be someone in your church community.

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Like, if that person in your church community is sitting down and having a conversation with you about something or you're sharing something and being vulnerable, they are playing that role.

And so, the first one, should I have someone in my life that I can talk to openly that's not going to judge me, that's going to love me unconditionally and help me process whatever it is, the answer is yes, in my opinion.

Jody: And you still do go to Melissa...

Jason: 10 years, every week. And I'll come back to that. I'll talk about why I feel that's still the case. So, I do feel like everyone should have someone. And I don't think someone they can talk to without judgment, who loves them and is going to help them. And I don't think it's enough for that to be like a friend or a family member because friends and family members, they have a little bit of an agenda in that relationship.

They want to stay your friend, you know, if it's a friend. Or they want to be a family – they want to be close to you as a family member. You really need someone who has no agenda on you and who can tell it to you, like tell you the truth, be honest with you, be hard on you when you need it, call you out when you need it, whether it's a coach or a therapist or someone else, it really depends.

Jody: What's the difference in your experience?

Jason: My experience is – because I have talked to a few therapists – my experience is that the therapists tend to come from a much more clinical or medical background and so, when we're talking, I get the sense that they're trying to put it into a framework or a diagnosis and then there's certain ways to treat a certain diagnosis based on the data and the history. And it just starts to feel more rigid, I guess, in a way, as opposed to the coaching for me where, at least in my case, my life coach, she's not classically

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trained in any medical field. She's not bound by any laws or dictates or whatever.

It's just, the gloves are off and it's just two people trying to make sense of what's going on, and who are willing to try lots of different things. It doesn't matter what the science says, we're going to try this or we're going to try that, and if it works for you, that's great. So, that's been the difference for me.

Jody: And more of a present and focus, a little bit less past focus, would you say? You did dive into your past quite a bit.

Jason: We did dive into my past a lot, yeah. That's what I mean. Some coaches, I think, will go there as well. And therapists will also go into the future. I feel like a coach, you know – a therapist might be, "How do I understand this thing that's happening or what happened?" whereas the coach, the initial question might be something like, "I'm not getting what I want out of life. I want different things out of life. How do I get those things." And so, it also starts from a different place a little bit.

Tim: Maybe, Jason, as we move toward wrap up here...

Jason: I didn't say the 10-year thing. I just want to say, I have been working with the same life coach for 10 years. I think what's fascinating about that is that we are much different people than we were 10 years ago. She is a completely different person. She keeps growing and changing.

Jody: Your coach?

Jason: Yes, she is not the same person. And I think that is very important. Whether it's a therapist, coach, person in the church, whoever, that person has to be climbing just as aggressively as any of their clients because

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that's how they stay ahead. That's how you stay higher on the mountain, or however you want to describe it.

Jody: That's a really good point, yeah.

Jason: Yeah, and that's been beautiful.

Tim: Yeah, and just to tack onto that, and potentially moving toward wrap up here, could you talk about where you find yourself now, emotionally and spiritually, and what you maybe see as your mission at this time in your life, given the journey that you've been through?

Jason: So, emotionally, since the book came out, it's been an emotional rollercoaster. I don't know that I appreciated how up and down it would be. But I'm bearing all of these secrets, you know. I think moments where I felt like I had to be a certain kind of person, I had to have all the answers because people started coming to me with lots of questions and I felt like I have to have this all figured out, knowing inside that I don't, I'm still very much on my journey. I am still learning and growing.

And so, I had to let go of those things. And so, it's been a really interesting six months or so since the book came out. But I'd say, if I had to characterize the last several years, Jody mentioned, earlier in the call, masculinity, and we really haven't touched on this. But I really have zeroed in on this as one of the core pieces of the story, to the point now where the way I describe the book to people, is on the surface, it's this flashy story of this guy who gets rich and goes off the rails into porn and sex and then recovers his marriage. That's the surface level story and it's a fun story and it's an interesting story and a lot of people can benefit from that story.

When you look one layer below that, it's a story of a boy being raised in a culture, in a society that has perpetuated, maybe encouraged kind of an immature model of masculinity. If I have money, cars, and women, I'll be

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happy. Once I get those things, I'm entitled to do whatever I want, this sense of entitlement, sexual entitlement, entitlement for anything.

And then, this boy, now he's 30, 35 years old, she's still a boy. Parts of him are still very much a boy inside. Now he's more dangerous because he's got all these tools and power. And he starts bumping up against the limitations of this boy consciousness. It is not working anymore.

And he realizes, he has to change. And he doesn't understand this at the time, but change means he has to transition from boy consciousness into mature, adult, male consciousness. And that is what starts to happen towards the end of the book.

And the book ends in 2015. And after a few years of reconstruction with Anne Marie and trust building and all of those things, we had a son, and this masculinity has really hit me like a ton of bricks. And that's really been my focus now. It's like, how can I be a more mature man? What does it mean to be a conscious man in society, being in service to others and stuff like that?

So, that's my job now. My job is to be in service. Writing this book was the first way to be in service, being on this podcast, I feel like I'm just trying to help, you know?

My agenda here is, if people can learn from what I went through, then I hope they do. And there's a love story in there too with Anne Marie and I, and I think that story helps a lot of couples because it's an example of, you can go through these things and stay together. You don't have to – and in fact, by forcing yourself to say...

I understand maybe some relationships shouldn't stay together. It's not a global rule. But by staying together, it forced us to do deeper work than we would have done if we would have separated. And that's also an interesting

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part. So, there's a lot of different layers. I feel like I'm talking a lot, but there's a lot of layers.

Jody: I agree. We could do three more episodes and cover all the topics...

Jason: Let's do another one.

Jody: I'm in. Any other questions, Tim, that we haven't covered?

Tim: I don't think so, from my end. I'm just super appreciative, Jason. I mean, when we talk about vulnerability, it does not get more vulnerable than living the story that you lived and then writing it in a book and publishing it. So, you're a model when it comes to that, and thank you.

Jason: Thank you.

Jody: Yeah, I would echo that and I would say that we just have nothing but love and best wishes to you and your family and if Anne Marie ever decides she's up for it, I'd love to have her come on the podcast. Anyway, thank you very much.

Jason: It was my pleasure, guys. Thanks for having me.

Tim: Thanks, guys.

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