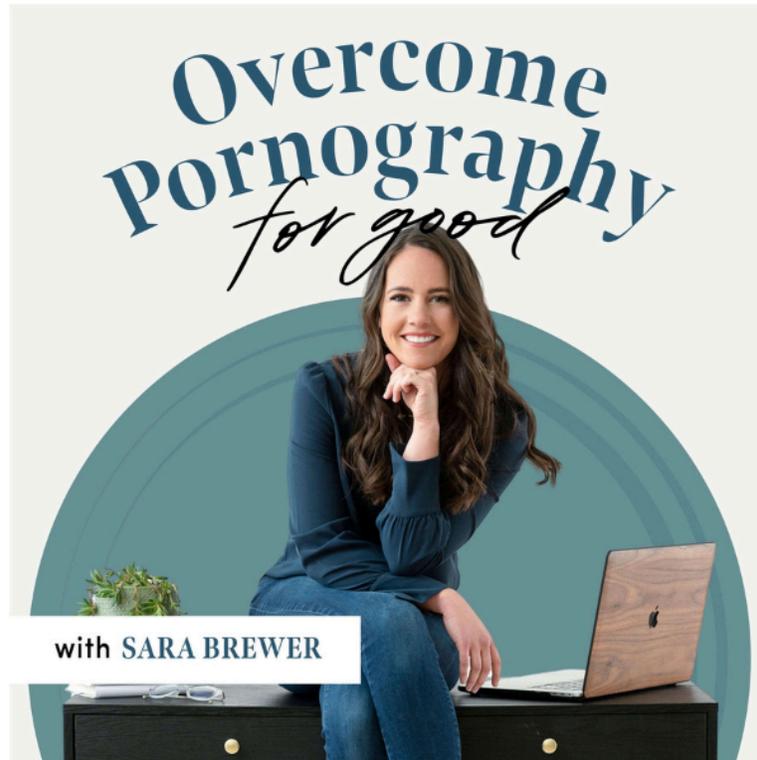


215. What's Possible with Ben



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the Overcome Pornography for Good podcast, What's Possible with Ben.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast where we take a research-based, trauma informed and results focused approach to quitting porn. This approach has been revolutionary and changed thousands and thousands of lives. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Hey you guys, I'm so excited to share this interview with you today. I had with Ben. He is a client of Jessica. He came in the program and he did the one-on-one coaching aspect which is such an amazing experience if you have the desire to come and do it.

It's really where people come in and are able to make this deepest level of change with a ton of one-on-one support and Jess is just amazing. Ben's story really will resonate with you if you grew up super religious, have maybe some scrupulosity, tendencies, and man, just like a really powerful story of what overcoming the shame can do, especially if that's your background and if you felt tons of pressure and felt like you had to hide it. Like if it came out, it would just destroy everything. His story is really powerful if you resonate with that, which I know many of you do.

So we do talk religion, we do talk faith in this episode and its impact on Ben and his work in overcoming. I know many of you will resonate with that. If you don't, I'm just here to remind you that we're not a faith-based program, which means when I say that, like whatever your faith background is, we implement and we help and our coaches are from all different backgrounds, but you don't need to be a part of a specific faith background. You don't even need like a religious background at all to see tons and tons of progress here.

So excited for you guys to hear Ben's story and be inspired by it, please enjoy.

Hey everyone, welcome to today's podcast episode. I am so excited to introduce you to Ben today. Ben has been a client of Jessica. Jess isn't

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here with us today, but he has an awesome story. So excited to hear from him today.

Okay, Ben. Do you want to start telling us your story? You can start wherever you'd like, but let's get into it.

Ben: Yeah for sure. I want to just do a service to all the listeners because I know that we all come from different faith backgrounds and I would be doing a disservice to my story if I didn't really use the lens of my faith background which is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which I know a lot of us are, but there's going to be a lot of things that ring true for all of us in this story.

I had some belief systems that I think I just learned things, like I probably heard them and I interpret them in a certain way that were damaging and as I put them into practice and it hurt and I've learned why that is now and I want to share some of that but I also am the descendant of some modern high-profile leaders within the LDS Church. And there was a lot of stress that I put on myself in terms of keeping up image and living up to legacy and that related to an expectation or a belief that I needed to have that approval. And that came through, you know, do you serve in certain callings or do you, those were qualifiers and things.

And so this was this kind of structure for me. Like, so.

Sara: Yeah, and let me just kind of clarify for some of our listeners too. So there's like high profile leaders that maybe you're a descendant of and so that creates a lot of maybe pressure or stress or if I'm struggling with this is actually maybe more of a big deal than for other people because of where I come from because of my family is that.

Ben: Yeah, and kind of this expectation like you shouldn't. This shouldn't be your issue. This shouldn't be your problem, you know, and you should know better or whatever. And so it really started to play out when I was 11. And that's a long time ago.

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And I'm not gonna date myself, but that was a long time ago. So as 11, my best friend lived a block away from me and his dad had struggled with a lot of health issues and his dad passed away. And we were so close and the world was just so different at that time that I remember going to school and the principal came and got me out of my class and drove me to his house in the middle of the school day which is that just wouldn't happen today to be with him on the day that his dad had died. And there going forward from that, there was, you know, this big kind of expectation that I think I, not necessarily given to me, but I felt, which was to help him process through this. Like I needed to be his friend.

I needed to be there for him. And I just spent spending a lot of time, like a lot of time together. And so that would be a lot of time spent with him. And eventually his mom moved on actually pretty quickly had a boyfriend. And he, my friend found some magazines at that his her new boyfriend had been hiding.

And of course, that became like the focus of, you know, an 11 year old like, "Hey, Let me show you this thing. Look what I found." And curiosity and like, "oh my gosh", kind of shock. And we both immediately were like, this probably isn't... I remember we hiked into the gully behind our houses and we buried it. We're like, and I was like, "Is he going to be mad?" And my friend is like, "I don't know."

"I don't care." I'm like, "yeah, that's right. We feel good about that. We buried it."

Sara: That's cute.

Ben: Well, as 12-year-olds, we were becoming deacons in the church. So it was like our first big responsibility and we both felt pretty terrible about that experience. Remember, we both went, like we should go talk to the bishop, you know? And that's someone who gives us the stamp of approval of being worthy to have this new calling, right? And it was great, it was not a bad experience, right? And it was kind of a pat on the head, like, don't do that. You know, and we're like, okay, gotcha, I'm 12, like, great.

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But you're 12 and you're curious, and then you saw something, and so then, and it doesn't change the fact that it just kept happening repeatedly, because he would find more and more things. And I was encouraged again to be with my friend, you know, to help him process through the death of his dad and to give him some stability.

And over those years, it was this on again, off again kind of discovery and then guilt and discovery and guilt. And, you know, us talking to each other like we shouldn't be doing this. But like, you know, it's but it was also like, I have to be there for my friend, but I know my parents would be so disappointed in this. And I, you know, so it's this cycle of like, you do this and that was, I felt trapped because I knew I needed to be there for him, but that became like a component of our relationship where I felt like it's his house, it's his stuff, and I needed to be there to support him.

So, I just didn't, you know, I didn't want to let anybody down. I didn't want to let him down, I didn't want to let my parents down, I didn't want to and so that really weighed on me. I didn't know who to talk to about it. And that led to one of the first big vocabulary words that I learned from working through your program is scrupulosity. And so, scrupulosity being like a form kind of a religious OCD in a way or creating false narratives but really around like worthiness and especially, you know, within the religious space.

And so I would be the kid under and I shared a room with my two brothers, right? So I didn't want to bother them at night, but I'm under my covers with a flashlight, reading my scriptures, looking up specific scriptures about how bad I was and how like I was going to face punishment and torment and how disqualifying I was to receiving forgiveness because it was this constant like, well, I know I shouldn't do that but I did it again. Or you know, I was with my friend and we looked at this again and you know, so I started this belief system of like, Heavenly Father's probably really tired of me asking for the same thing. Like, help me stop doing this. He's probably like, this is annoying.

And I created this like mindset that like, he's disappointed, he's disappointed. And that drives me away. Right. Like I don't want to pray and

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talk anymore. And I would fight through that. And I went and talked with my bishop again, and again, great experience, different bishop this time, but great experience actually. He was amazing.

And he even said, well, I remember him saying, if you sat here and told me that you didn't, I'd be like, I think you're kind of lying. Everybody, like, there's so many. So he was the first one who kind of normalized it, but it was so rare. And I remember just thinking like, wow, how great was that? But he's like, but you really got to, yeah, stop. I'm like, I know, right? I get you.

But I was already kind of in this mindset of like, okay, I got to, you know, I got to be working on it, you know? I mean, at the same time, there's things that we do within the church to kind of show contrition. And part of that is I'm going to restrict you from certain activities. And in a very small congregation that I was a part of with very little amount of young men my age that were responsible for certain ordinances like communion, sacrament. And when you're told you can't do that, you feel like there's a scarlet letter. You kind of sit there and people look at you like, why are you not helping? And so that I remember feeling pain there.

Sara: We don't have to go into that, but how do you feel like that affected you? How old were you when that happened? Just to clarify, it was, okay, so you go and you tell the bishop, I viewed porn and he says, okay, you got to stop and you're loved and it's okay, but you can't pass the sacrament anymore. And that's what the 12-year-olds are assigned to do is to pass the sacrament.

Ben: Yeah. At this point, I'm like 16, you know, so I'm blessing the sacrament or whatever.

Sara: So you have even more blessing the sacrament. And so then there kind of comes the, like people notice.

Ben: Yeah. So you're sitting down there. Yeah. You know, and my parents didn't ask, they just kind of, you know, figured. And, you know, so then it,

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and then it feels more shameful, you know, like where I feel like on, on that end where it's okay, I can't, who do I talk to about this or how do I feel like this is leading me towards a place of healing or an acceptance when it feels like I just have the eyes on me, which is what did you do?

You know and yeah, that hurts, you know.

Sara: If anyone here has heard I do Ecclesiastical leader training every now and then we talk about how to help, you know, kids who are working through this or others. And this is something that I really do not think is helpful. I do not think, and you know, you can have different opinions about it, but I'm just going to throw that in here.

It's like, even like we're trying, we're doing the best we can and, you know, really trying to help people and kids and all these things. And I see this typically doing more harm than not.

I'm just going to say that and let you keep going with your story.

Ben: Yeah. Well, and I just, I also want to say like, my parents are amazing and I'm sure that they, you know, if they had noticed it or whatever, like that they would have kind of saw it as like, okay, he's doing good. Like, you know, he's doing what he needs to do to kind of get through it, through the process. And over, you know, throughout the years, there were definitely moments in which my parents would either be aware of it as a young teen, like on my dad's computer, I'd looked something up and he'd, he's like, "That wasn't me." We talk and so they were great, but it was nothing that they did.

It was the fact that I did not want to let anyone down. So I just hid. I just, it's that, like go hide. Like that is, you know, and that's a thing and don't show your weakness and don't, you know, don't seek after it, you know? And anyway, so there I am living in fear.

So I had this moment where my grandmother, when I was 16, she passed away. And again, given the family that I come from, there were a few, just a handful of speakers at the funeral, but one of them was President Hinckley

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and the other one was President Monson, you know, prophets of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And I was a pallbearer and I was standing, waiting to receive the casket to put it into the hearse and they came down from the stand and exited that way and President Hinckley shook my hand and this is just shortly after his talk about pornography being a plague, you know, and I already felt like I'm dealing with this disease.

And he shook my hand and he with his wonderful self and smile, asked me, "Are you keeping yourself worthy to serve a mission?" And I panic because you're 16 and you already feel like I'm fighting this. I have this plague that you just discussed and at 16, the only thing that come out of my mouth was "Yes." Even though immediately it was like you just lied to the prophet in his face while you're shaking his hand. And that killed me. That just gutted me.

So I took that, that really, that hurt a lot. I guess in a way I kind of used it as like a negative motivation tool to prepare for my mission in a way, like I'll show you, I am gonna be worthy, even though in that moment I didn't feel. But this was the part where I started to confuse the difference between being worthy, just capital W worthy, and being temple worthy.

And so, I attributed like the worth, like just being worth, like I'm worth something, I have value, I am worth being loved, versus if I'm not living up to this set of standards, then I am further letting down God, and I'm letting down the leaders of this church, I'm letting down my parents, I'm letting down people close to me, I'm just letting them down, just disappointing everybody. And that became this framework for me, unfortunately. And I didn't really know the difference for a very long time. And that's probably like where the real shame kind of started for me.

Sara: Yeah. Yeah, that sounds like a really painful experience. It sounds really painful. Is that wound, it's not trite. It is very damaging, that worthiness wound.

Ben: Yeah, I love when you use the word wound when we're talking about these things, because it is, so it's behavior and things that I was doing that I

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knew was not good, but it created more wounds within me than just like the act of the disobedience or whatever. So this was all at a time when I was like, I didn't know it at the time, later on in life, diagnosed with ADHD and anxiety and whatever, but I was the epitome of the most anxious ADHD kid where just full, I was just full. I played a lot of sports, I did a lot of performances, I did a lot of high profile things, but I was always the person who was like right before it was time to go on the field or on stage or whatever, I was in the bathroom getting sick. Like I just lived with this ball of anxiety and that really fed this whole, the kind of shame and worry really kind of fed into that.

So fast forward, I'm able to focus in and change and really desire to go serve as a missionary for our church. And I mean, this, and it's funny because one of the first podcasts I ever heard from you, Sara, is like, it blew my brain because you started in with like this first eight minutes of like, this is my average, you know, client or your prisoner program. They grow up in the church, they get exposed to pornography at an early age. They kind of go back and forth with it. They lock it down, they go on a mission, they come home, life starts. And then they find themselves kind of back in it and they can't figure out why and they're frustrated and they're whatever and they're kind of hiding away. And like I sat there being like, does she know my story?

Sara: I'm like, actually, I'm talking about Ben. Ben doesn't know who he is.

Ben: No, for sure. It was super weird. It's like, where were you like, look around? You're like, wait a minute, there's somebody like watching me. Like, so I, it blew me away when I realized I thought my story was so unique.

And so I had to go through this realization of like, I'm not unique and I'm happy to not be unique because there's so much of this and it's misunderstood. And I've misunderstood it, you know, because I had tried to self-diagnose a lot, right? Like so, anyway, go on a mission, have a great mission experience. Like first time of feeling like I'm free of these things, I'm obviously focused, I'm feeling very positive about my ability to move past

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this and be really dedicated. And you know, I came home and within a year, you know, I'm married.

I'm going to school full-time. I'm working full-time, you know. So, that's a lot of things to juggle and I'm even called into like a bishopric in our ward. So kind of the leadership and at, you know, at 22, 23 or whatever, like, so there's a lot, I mean, it's a lot of things.

Sara: It's a lot of things. And I talk about this, you know, because I see this in like my family and like community like for it's just really wild. Sometimes the expectations we have of these 20 year olds and especially you come right home or you go like the expectation it's like get married have kids be responsible if you're a man make sure you're providing whereas the reality is in the world it's probably not a bad thing to take a little bit of time and not feel so much pressure to be able to provide right away. It just takes time. 22 years old, 23 years old.

So I can see how that might also build up, and correct me if I'm wrong, but build up some of these like, you know, more stress, more anxiety, more pressure, more like, am I enough, am I enough, Am I doing enough? I have to be providing. I have to be a great church leader. I have to be a great husband.

Ben: Well, yeah, so it does. So I was dealing with that internally. Not that I like, I think consciously acknowledge that. It's just that I had this like void that I was like, I have to, this is the level that not only like, I have to live up to, I like need to in order to be viewed by God as worthy to, you know, be to do, I don't know, like just, I guess, worthy of love, like approval. Like, so, yeah, but here's the problem. You have all those things and things are gonna blow up, right? Like school doesn't go great or your job doesn't go great or like I'm newly married and so like we're trying to figure that stuff out and it's so much.

And so, you know, I had firmly established this pattern of being this anxious ADHD teen, you know, that hadn't figured it out, like, developed my own coping strategies because I was never diagnosed. I had to just learn it on

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my own. And so, I, this was the first, as I look back on it now I go okay all these stressors came in and another great term that I've learned from you is buffering like it's just this is an activity which is I'm gonna do this instead of this because I don't want to face this right now.

And I had created this construct of where I'm like, I get to a certain point of stress or a certain negative viewpoint on myself or self-acceptance and it moved into, okay, I'm going to buffer with pornography or I'm going to buffer with, you know, these images, you know, and it, like, as I've learned later in life as an ADHD adult, like, really it's a lot of related to dopamine, like, we're kind of deficient in it. And so that's a really effective way of just forcing dopamine. I'm going to go look at something really exciting and it's going to make me forget about my reality for the next few minutes.

And you just do that. You do that to shut out. And you feel worse coming back out of it. And you're like, why did I do that? It felt great for five minutes to check out. And, but now I feel worse, cause now I feel stupid and I feel shame.

And I feel like, you know, and that was it. That's where like the whole crossover from guilt, like I did something wrong to like I am something wrong. And that's just totally where I lived. I lived in this, I am wrong. I am wrong, I am wrong, I am broken, I don't know why, I don't want to keep doing this, this is the worst ever. And it was just this cycle of that, you know, and it's like, I was one of those people that would set like these goals like, oh, January 1st, it's over, right? Or my birthday, it's over. And you fall into that trap too because then you go months and months and then you flip up and you're like, okay, I just wasted all that time. It's terrible. And you just let that build up.

It goes like that for quite some time. And then I heard a phrase from you that blew my mind again, because I'd never put those words all together, and it was unwanted pornography use. And it's just three words. I'd never seen them strung together in a phrase like that. But I like, for me, I'm like, I had been struggling for all this time, for years and years, with like, I'm not addicted. Everything was around addiction. Like, it was never compulsory

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for me. It was never like this drive. It was just this like choice activity that I would do situationally to be like, to get out of. But I hadn't even noticed that yet. I hadn't even yet noticed what is driving me to choose this and why, right? I just knew I hate this about myself. I hate myself for it. And, but I'm not addicted.

And then, everything I was looking around, like, oh, I don't think the 12-step program has a programming or curriculum that makes sense for me. There's stuff that doesn't apply. A lot of the media that I'm consuming is like, you're going to wreck your family, you're going to lose everything. If you talk to anybody about it or everything's around sexual deviancy, I'm like, I'm not a sexual deviant. Like this is not a gateway to something else. Like I just couldn't figure out, but then I was also afraid to talk to anybody, right?

Sara: Yeah, well, and you're also in these leadership positions.

Ben: Which is a trap, which is also a trap. And this is like, cause then you're gonna let anybody down, right? Then it's even more public or shameful or whatever.

Sara: Yeah, right. Then if you do that and you get released from your calling, that's that 16 year old, you can't pass the sacrament anymore, but that's like times 10. That's that like shaming public, shaming community.

Ben: For sure. And now I have bigger stakes, right? I've got my wife, I've got my children, I've got like, you know, and then it's just, but then it's just letting so many more people down. Even though in my heart, I'm like, I need this change. I need this healing. I need some help, but I don't know how to do it. And so, I guess the motivation was so much fear, you know, about judgment and whatever.

So, I realized that I didn't have a pornography problem, I had a pornography solution. My solution was pornography and it was a terrible one, right? There was no real solution. It was like, yeah, sure, I can feel all the stress or whatever occasionally and I'll just go. But it just wasn't there.

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So that's not real. And so I had to, I finally heard someone, Clay Olsen, who's the founder of Impact Suite, Fortify, I think it's the name, Clay.

Sara: Oh, Fortify. I've heard of it.

Ben: Yeah, Fortify. Yeah, so it's like an app. It's like an accountability app or whatever. Something I looked into years and years ago. But then I started following his stuff.

And he was in an interview, somebody asked him, so is this an addiction or not? And he's like, I'm not gonna say that. But what I do think is that it is a spectrum of struggle. And I thought, that's a really cool phrase. Because he's like, if you need to call it an addiction to get yourself to a place where you can get help, then do it.

If it's an unwanted activity that you want to unpack and figure out why, then that's great too. And so for me, everything was so parked in addiction, right? And I'm like, it just, that's not, it doesn't resonate. But unwanted pornography use, absolutely, 100%.

Sara: Yeah, for listeners, we have a bunch of podcast episodes where I dive into that a little bit more in depth if you're interested in hearing. What is an addiction? Am I addicted? Am I not addicted? How do I want to use this label?

When is this helpful for me? And we typically, what you said, use it if it's helpful, but also it's not an addiction like a drug addiction. We've got to be careful not to put them in the same category there. And we love the term unwanted porn use and we love the term porn habit. It seems to fit with a lot of our clients.

Ben: Sure. So I know I've spent a lot of time kind of building up to this story, but it's like for me like this big culmination of like living this, what I felt like as a double life, like this fraudulent side of me where it's like I can't, I mean, it almost feels like I should say like I'm in real estate, right? So, it's like my career and kitchen cell houses or kitchen kitchens are always like perilous, like a place where everybody comes to, right?

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So I imagined this like immaculate, beautiful, wonderful kitchen where bright and clean and just, you know, you can smell the cookies that are cooking in there, right? But every kitchen in my brain, it was like every kitchen has a junk drawer. Like, that's where everything goes, right? Where it's like, it doesn't have a place, and so it just gets shoved in there. And it was like, okay, I have a junk drawer. I have a really ugly, dark, gross junk drawer, and I don't, like, everybody can see this kitchen on the outside, but I have this piece that I don't know how to unpack and I don't know who's going to do that with me and be okay with it.

And so I felt trapped for sure and felt like a fraud and then that led to just super big feelings of failure. And then in a short amount of time, there were a lot of things that just microcosm like on to in my life, like started a new job that imploded just unexpectedly and just dramatically terrible, right? To me personally, it was wrapped up in this.

Then I started a company with one of my best friends and that blew up fantastically and it was a waste of time and a waste of money. And it was embarrassing to have involved my friend in that. And again, the real estate market, I just kind of talked about like, we hit this part where interest rates went crazy and inflation and just everything was like, I just couldn't perform and couldn't get anything done. And I was feeling like I was working so hard and failing at so many things.

And then I totaled my truck, like just on the stupid mistake and like all of that happened. And I just, the failure in me was just like just so much, like it was just so dark. And so it was really, you know, leading me into wanting to just check out from that. And when I talked with Jess and she's so great and I want to just put a plug in for when I started.

Sara: Jessica is the one-on-one coach that you had.

Ben: She is my coach. And when I started this, I was like, okay, you know, of course you think like, is this expensive? Like, is it worth the money? You know, and you're like, okay. But at that point I was just so hurt and beaten down.

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I was like, just take it. Like, take it. There had been times in the past when I had like talked myself out of it. I'm like, and I really wish that I had just gone through that. I'm like, no, I can listen to enough podcast episodes and I can, you know, research this stuff on my own.

But like, I would highly suggest if you need to process through some things because I'm gonna tell you why. All of this, I'm working with Jessica on this and I will say 95% of our appointments, we've never talked about pornography. Like that's like a misnomer, right? Like because to overcome the unwanted use, you have to go and address the hard stuff. And that's what, you have to unpack that.

And that's, so I'm describing this, and Jess goes, you're grieving. I'm like, what? She's like, no, you're in grief. You need to process through this. Everything you just said is terrible.

And have you given yourself an opportunity to do this? And I'm thinking, what are you talking about? And so then she diagrams this whole grief process and I'm taking notes and I realized like, oh yeah, like in the process, I won't get super nerdy, but it's kind of a circle as these processes go. And I got to like three quarters of the way through the circle and I built an off ramp where I would, you know, to the resolute, I would just skip resolution. I'd go right towards like, I'm just gonna bump her.

Like, I'm gonna avoid that part to get to resolution. And by doing that, I was circumventing, I was robbing the opportunity to heal. And as I learned how to grieve these things out of my control, That is where, you know, the gospel kind of came back into light where I'm like, this is a section of thing that I can't do without the atonement of Jesus Christ. Like, I can't change what happened here and what happened there and I can't go back and have this person think differently about this or whatever. I have to rely upon the atonement to fill that piece that I can't do.

And until I started to realize that and the fact that repenting or changing our ways or whatever was always the plan. Like it wasn't put there as like a side note.

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Sara: It wasn't like plan B. It wasn't be perfect and plan B repent.

Ben: Right And that's what's interesting is I had told myself somehow that when you, let's say, when you're baptized, you're now perfect. You're like on the road. And if you deviate, then you need to, again, you've disappointed God, you've disappointed someone. You need to go back and get that forgiveness and get back on the path and now you're perfect again. And then you're gonna fall off of it and now you're disappointed.

So it's this constant round of disappointment. And so I had created this thought process of like this expectation that he would be disappointed every time, you know? And so then it drives you into thinking like, he doesn't want to hear from me anymore. He doesn't want to, he's so tired of hearing me from, hearing from me about this.

So, but it was this realization through this process of understanding grief and then rethinking about how I'm applying the atonement of Christ is the thing that we can be 100% perfect in is picking ourselves up. So the perfection comes in turning back to God. It comes in, okay, I messed up. I'm gonna be perfect in changing. I'm gonna be perfect in returning. And it's a constant, right? And it's that you just rinse and repeat that.

And so it's not the expectation that God's going to be disappointed in you. It's actually, there's a great book I read called Is God Disappointed in You? Or Is God Disappointed in Me? It's by Kurt Francom and he has some points in there where he says he doesn't have an expectation, he has an expectancy. Like the expectancy is that he knows that we're going to struggle. And so, like, the Savior was provided for us to be able to repent and change as opposed to like, well, you messed up, so now we got to put this guy in play. Like, it's just part of it.

You know, I think it was Elder Wilcox who had said, there was one of the hymns that we sing in church where amazed by the love Jesus proffers me. I never knew what the word proffer meant, right, until he unpacked it and he's like, it's proactively offering. So that forgiveness and that understanding and that love is proactively offered because we are gonna

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mess it up. And we just need to be okay, like accepting that we're gonna mess it up. And he knows that we're gonna mess it up. And I for so, so, so long, literally just thought about the, it's a subtle difference.

Like it doesn't change the need for repentance, but it changes the intent behind it or the acceptance of Heavenly Father's love that our worth is infinite. And it's not tied to whether or not we are worthy to go into a temple or worthy to do an ordinance. Like, worth is innate. The worth of souls is great in the sight of God. No asterisk, no, you know, it's just period. Like that's it.

So once I was able to process through grief with Jessica, then it opened up so much because then I was like, okay, cool. I can, I'm worth loving. I can love myself despite my mistakes, I can use my mistakes as data points to figure out why I did that or why that happened and then I can change and I can live 100% authentically. I can clean out this junk drawer, right?

And when it comes to like doing that, I have to give so much credit to my wife who has been so hurt by me, but also so forgiving and loving. And this is in the midst of all of the betrayal trauma that she's experienced because of this and because again from her, I was living in this construct of I can't burden anybody with this.

And I think, and this will hopefully resonate with other people going through this, is that if you're afraid that your person is going to just, I don't know, you fill in the blank, like whatever reaction or punishment they're gonna lob upon you, it's, for me, and I think I'm finding for a lot of people that I hear is the pain is less in the sin or the choice of pornography, that the pain is in not trusting that she'd be there to help me, right? The pain is in not bringing her into it.

Sara: The betrayal trauma isn't necessarily from the porn use, it's maybe from feeling lied to, is that what you're saying? Is that what I'm hearing?

Ben: Yeah, yeah, like feeling lied to, but also just feeling like undercut. Like I believed that she wouldn't have the capacity or the desire or the love to

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help me through the challenge. You know what I mean? So like I robbed her of the opportunity to be that person.

You know?

Sara: Yeah, there's like so much love and compassion for both sides because as you hear your story, there's no part of you that is like blaming you. It's all just like, I understand. Like, of course, like with the conditioning, there's just like so much compassion for both sides.

Ben: For sure, but not taking away all the hurt that this causes. But there is a lot of confusion, you know, out in mainstream about what this really means for people or why they choose it or whatever.

Sara: Really unfair assumptions.

Ben: Yeah. I felt trapped. I felt scared. I felt helpless and I just, when you feel those, you just, you'd numb out. You want to get away and you just run. And one of the things that I'm trying to do now as I live authentically is get out in front of it, right?

And bring something that Jessica said is like the people, how did she word it? I'm going to ruin it, Jessica, I'm sorry. It's like you can tell your story to the people who deserve to hear it or something like that. And yeah, like, so, you know, I have a teenage son and I have a teenage daughter and they have been integral in their own parts of this story in discussing this with them.

And my oldest son is not a touchy feely person. He hates getting a hug. Like he just doesn't. And he always has since he was a baby. He doesn't like physical touch. And when I had this conversation with him and just shared everything again, he's a teenager.

I don't want him to go through some of the same thought processes that I did and wanted to let him know like how much I, you know, had struggled or whatever. He immediately jumped up from the bed and just wrapped me in a hug. And I, that's just going to be filed away in my brain forever.

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And when I told my daughter, which was incredibly hard, later that day, I was reading that book that I told you about, like, is God disappointed in me? And I'm down in the family room and she comes down and she had her own book and she came and snuggled up next to me and she just said, no.

And I said, what are you talking about? Like I didn't get what she was going with and she said, he's not disappointed in you because you're trying. And that was such a like a healing moment, but also just, yeah, just such a rewarding, like piece of like, you can do this. Like you can change your nature. You can be open about it and people will love you.

Sara: So healing for you and also like I'm getting chills thinking about your kids and like what a beautiful example and like lesson and like the vulnerability that you have but then also I don't know I just don't think it serves kids to always believe that their parents are perfect, you know? But to see you go through this and then love yourself through it and find that worth and that worthiness in that, oh my gosh, what a blessing for them.

Ben: They are amazing, forgiving, wonderful kids. And my wife is incredible, even though that, those experiences cause more pain, especially, you know, to her and them having to see that, you know, like we don't have it all figured out, you know, but I can't be totally authentic with my life or with helping others through it if I don't, you know, if I just don't be 100% open and say, and I find so much energy and joy and positivity and thinking about being able to just be open and positive and just I'm not hiding anything.

I'm not living a double life. Like there's so much less stress and trauma that I'm causing myself or others in saying like, no, I have nothing to hide. You can ask me anything and you know, and I couldn't do that at the beginning.

I was so terrified to even start working with you and with Jess and whoever else. Like I was like, I would never be able to sit and have this conversation a year ago. Like this, it's just, it's impossible. But now I can.

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Sara: Yeah, love that.

Ben: The other big thing that came from you in this curriculum is like the phrase, thoughts are thoughts. Like thoughts are thoughts and they're just passing and they don't give power over you unless you just grab it and give it place. Like everybody has weird thoughts. It's okay and that was always a thing too. I'm like oh man, your thoughts are gonna condemn you.

Well your thoughts, that's not the point. Like, you know, you could have a crazy weird thought and it's just a thought and let it go.

Sara: You are not your thoughts. Your thoughts are not you.

Ben: You are not your thoughts. Like, you know, it's just a thought. Like, don't give it place, don't give it energy if you don't want to. Like, that was weird.

Sara: Yes, especially those of us who are more, a little more scrupulous than others.

Ben: For sure.

Sara: Yeah, it's like a common thing, especially with OCD. Or OCD tendencies is these thoughts, but then like you're so concerned about them that you like hold on to them or you freak out about them or they happen more because you're scared of them.

Ben: Yeah, yeah. So it's been so freeing to be like, that's a thought, I don't really care. And also, this bad thing happened, like, you know, it's okay. And or even if it's a really bad thing, like, all right, I'm gonna sit with it. I'm gonna, where am I feeling it in my body?

Where, what do I need to do to process through it? Like, what's it telling me, right? Like, all of these things have been so, like they're so innate in human nature, but you don't think about it. But if you do give it place, you're like, okay, it's not like it's overpowering me. I have to kind of put that into action.

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It's just, yeah, this realization like you really do have a lot of control, but it takes like that externality, like almost looking at yourself as the subject. Like, what am I feeling right now? That's weird. What is that telling me? I don't like that feeling.

Like, what do I need to do right now to move into a different space?

Sara: Yeah. You can't control your thoughts. I love this concept. You cannot control your thoughts. You can't. But you can control what happens after a thought.

You can't control if you like, maybe decided that you wanna go into it a little bit more, but those first thoughts, you can't control and that's a lie. And that creates a lot of pain to believe that.

Ben: Yeah, for sure. Well, cause you do grow up with something like, your thoughts will condemn you, or if you've thought about this, it's like committing adultery and you're like, whoa, wait a minute. And then in my brain, be like, oh, well, adultery is next to murder. So therefore, I'm a really terrible person. So it's all of these things that have fed this worldview or this kind of narrative, which isn't great.

They're all factoids, but they don't tell the right story.

Sara: Yeah, and it's so beautiful to come and do this healing work and to understand it for yourself so that we can start to change things going forward for our kids, for other people that we're in involvement with. Because especially, you know, scrupulosity, it's not just like a, it's your fault or you were just born that way. There's some of that like personality, but there's also like conditioning that can bring it to a head. And so understanding so we can carefully choose our words and think about things a little differently going forward for people's beautiful.

Ben: For sure. Yeah so again I'm just super grateful. I know I've taken up a ton of time at this point. So.

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Sara: It's great. So I have a few more questions if you, I'm happy to ask, but is there anything else that we missed that you wanted to share or do you feel that all of it's been amazing?

Ben: Yeah, I think this is pretty good.

Sara: Okay. Amazing. So my last two questions, the first one, is there anything like what do you think is possible for you now going forward after doing all of this work? What do you see for yourself in the future?

Ben: Yeah.

Sara: Because we say this is about so much more than quitting porn and you've done such a beautiful way of describing why that is. And I'm curious, like looking forward, what else is there for you? What do you see?

Ben: I used to think or believe that I suffered from imposter syndrome. And I think maybe to a small degree, I kind of do, just because whatever. But a lot of this, and I just say like, in this amount of time that I've been working through this, one of the things I was absolutely terrified of doing is in my industry, I get asked a lot to go to these conferences and sit on a panel and be an expert of yada, yada, yada. And I was super terrifying because I'm like, everybody in here knows way more than me, right? So, I just couldn't get myself to do it.

Since doing this work, not only have I done that multiple times and will continue, like I have more scheduled even just this month and next month, you know, big national settings and things. I have the confidence to do that. Like where it's like, even though it has nothing to do with this spiritual whatever side of me, but it's like, no, actually, I do have authority. I do have confidence in myself because I know myself and I'm not hiding a piece of myself or maybe a big portion of my self-confidence was locked away as well. So, it's being able to address all of these hard feelings of inadequacy and disappointment and failure and fraudulence.

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Like I've unlocked the ability in my own professional and practical life to say, no, I'm me and I'm lovable and I'll love myself and I'm fallible and I'm okay with that.

Sara: I love it. I love that. That gives me chills and makes me so excited because this is when it gets fun. It's like, okay, the porn stuff was hard, but now like this can be maybe a little fun and like, like I've unlocked these keys to feeling and to doing all of this. And this is where, ah, it's just so much more about porn.

Now we get to really live fully big if we want to. Yeah. How to.

Ben: For sure. And you know, on top of that, a lot of this motivation for me is to connect with even just one youth or who is feeling that same, those same senses of being trapped or whatever, as I did as youth, or an adult who's feeling trapped because of how they're serving or in what capacity they're serving or being afraid of disappointing their spouse or kids or just that fear of that unknown. Like, just to tell them that there's so much more freedom with the pain like it's the most painfully freeing thing that they could do if this is their issue like yeah.

Sara: Yeah cool I love it thank you so much. And then my last question is what would you say to someone who is where you were, maybe they're considering joining or coming in and doing the work a little bit more in-depth. Do you have any advice for them or thoughts for them?

Ben: Yeah, like don't talk yourself out of it. Like you're listening or you've researched or you've spent, I mean, I'm not the only one. There's so many that have done interviews like this where I've said, "Oh, I was, I consumed probably every episode of the podcast, right?" You know, tried this app or I'd done this thing. And I would say that you just don't wait.

And I'd also would say because again, I'm like a little bit miserly in a way that you know, if somebody is looking at the cost and going, "I can't justify that" or "It's you know, I'm not gonna do that." I just look and go and if it's

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something that has like, it was 30 years for me, 30 years of trying to figure myself out.

And I totally can be like, "Oh yeah, I'm going to explain away like no way, like I'm not going to do that, like I'm not going to." I also had a lot of shame because I'm like "I'm not going to take that family or that money from my family. Like I'm not gonna, I could do so much more with that. I could take them on vacation or whatever" and you know, I can explain away a lot of things but then I think to myself, the reality is they don't want another vacation, they want their dad.

And they want their dad and their husband or whatever to be in a place where they're living authentically, that they are feeling love, that they are giving love, capable of doing that and showing up every day and being dependable and just doing all the things to function as an amazing family member. If this thing is keeping you from that, they don't need another trip.

If that's where you're going to equate it to or whatever, like, also that there's most likely so many people in your corner that even if that's a struggle, they'll people want to help, right? Like, and if there's fear of coming out and talking to somebody like my probably best adult friend in the world, like here lives a quarter mile from me and was my bishop for a time as an adult. And I was so fearful of losing a friendship because I didn't know how to talk to him about my experience as a bishop.

And then knowing eventually he's gonna take that hat off, you know, and we still have our friendship, like how do I do that? And I got past that, but it took a long time. And it's something that you will find that you'll just find your people. You know, he is my family, right? He's my friend, family, like for life, like even though he's no longer, you know, the Bishop, but he was a period of time when I really needed him to help me process through a lot of this stuff. Like we still go to lunch and we'll talk about these things. And I'm like, and he's not even in that role. He's just a friend. He's a friend who wants to help and understand more. And there's people in your corner, there's people in your corner that you don't know are there. And if you don't rob them of the opportunity to not be there.

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Sara: I love that. And it's such, it's like this, especially I feel like conditioning in men too, there's especially conditioning of like, it's scary to be vulnerable. It's scary to not just put on your stoic face and be, you know, untouchable. It can be scary, but like how beautiful, like beautiful it is when you are and there are people in your corner and we're in your corner too. So like we've got your back and there's a whole community for you waiting here too on our end and you know, we've got support groups every single week in the program too to help you and support you plus all the, you know, other coaching calls and stuff.

But I just want to let people know too, like even if your mind's going, "Well, but everyone is going to reject me." It's probably not true, but if it is, you've got us. Right. No matter what.

Ben: That's just that I think you'll find your people. I can, And I'm still, there's a lot of people that I have not yet really opened up to about this and I will. And I know that everybody has their ability to choose, they have their agency and I'll find my people, you know, that way. And whoever part of the pendulum that they're in when it comes to understanding this and you know, it's just maybe another piece of information that they're going to use to maybe launch their understanding of it. But you know, those of us that are here and in the thick of it and we see it from our way, we just have to recognize not everybody knows these things yet.

But don't preclude them from the opportunity of learning it.

Sara: Yeah, beautiful. Thank you. Thank you so much, Ben. It's been a pleasure. It's been amazing.

I appreciated this so much. Thank you so much, everyone, for listening. Thank you so much for being here. We'll talk to you next week. And you want to say goodbye, Ben?

Ben: Oh, see you everybody. And yeah, just thanks again for the opportunity. I wish you all the best.

Sara: Yeah, thank you. All right, you guys, talk to you next week. Bye-bye.

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I want to invite you to come and listen to my free class, How To Overcome Pornography For Good Without Using Willpower. We talk about how to stop giving in to urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't have more willpower. And then lastly, we talk about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent.

If you're trying to quit porn, this class is a game changer. So you can go and sign up at Sarabrewer.com/masterclass, and it is totally free.