Standing Ready to Forgive

Guest: Vicki Tiede
From the series: When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography (Day 2 of 2)
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Bob: Vicki Tiede has a word for wives—she says, “If your husband confesses to you that he’s been looking at pornography, you should be encouraged.”

Vicki: In Genesis 32, Jacob has an all-night wrestling match with God. In the morning, he’s standing; but he walks with a limp. When women find out their husbands are struggling with an addiction and he’s confessed that to her, she needs to thank God for that spiritual take down because, then, you know that God’s working in his life and that he’s, hopefully, going to recover from this. But the rest of the world doesn’t struggle with this. They just continue in the behavior. The good guys struggle.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, January 22nd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll hear today from Vicki Tiede about how a wife can and should respond when she’s confronted with the reality that her husband is struggling with pornography. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Friday edition. We’re going to talk about a heavy subject today.

But we have to start off with a big announcement because we have some friends, Alfred and Beverly Thomas, who are celebrating 44 years of marriage together today—44th wedding anniversary for the Thomas’s. These guys—these guys have been to 17 Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways. Now, some of those they have come as volunteers because they’ve helped bring the Weekend to Remember to Detroit. They’ve volunteered in other cities, and they’re friends of ours. They listen to FamilyLife Today on WLQV. We just wanted to say, “Happy 44th Wedding Anniversary!”

That means they got married four years before FamilyLife began. We’re celebrating 40 years of ministry this year as the “Proud Sponsor of Anniversaries.” We are, together, celebrating the anniversaries of friends of this ministry all year long. So “Congratulations!” to the Thomas’s on 44 years together today. I know, if they were here today, they would say to you: “If you’ve never been to a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway, you ought to come this spring. If you have been, it’s probably time for a refresher / for a checkup.”
Today’s the last day that I’ve got to let you know about the special offer we’re making this week where, if you pay the regular price to attend a getaway for yourself, your spouse comes free. So take advantage of the special offer by signing up today for an upcoming Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. You can do that online at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.” Register for an upcoming getaway.

When you get in touch with us, let us know your anniversary date and year so that we can celebrate your anniversary this year. We’re all about anniversaries in 2016 because that’s what we’re all about, as a ministry—helping couples go the distance in their marriage. We believe, when God puts a husband and wife together, He intends for that relationship to be a lifetime covenant relationship “…until death do us part.”

I believe that / you believe that—and yet, at the same time, we’ve been in situations, Dennis, where we’ve had to sit across the table from people, where we have said, “Maybe the best thing for you right now / the most healthy thing you can do is to separate, with redemption in view / with a redemptive goal in mind.”

**Dennis:** —“or to prove that one or the other, who has sinned in the situation, are truly repentant.”

**Bob:** Yes. Sometimes, that’s what it takes to let both people see the seriousness of where the sin has taken them in a marriage relationship. That’s really the territory we’re going to walk into today as we talk about the issue of pornography and what happens in a marriage relationship when pornography is a part of it.

**Dennis:** Yes. I just want to make one comment about divorce here, Bob, because it really raises the question, “Did Jesus allow for divorce?” I don’t think Jesus encouraged divorce. I think He recognized that there is a condition of the heart—a hardness of the heart. I think it’s about the realness of the Scripture that recognizes the brokenness of humanity, where yes—divorce, in certain situations, is allowed. It’s not the default-position and shouldn’t be the default-position for Christians—who have friends who come to them, seeking counsel.

**Bob:** The Bible is a book about reconciliation. It’s always God’s desire and design for relationships that have been broken to be reconciled. There are times when divorce may be necessary for protective reasons. That’s part of what we’re getting to here today.

**Dennis:** Exactly. We have a guest with us, on the broadcast—Vicki Tiede, who joins us again on *FamilyLife Today*. Vicki, welcome back.

**Vicki:** Thank you so much!
Dennis: We have a mutual friend—who is, I guess, a distant relative?—

Vicki: Right.

Dennis: —Bob Tiede, who, for a number of years, was Josh McDowell’s right-hand man. Bob Tiede is a good friend. Vicki, he’s a good friend of yours because he sent us your book and said, “You need to get Vicki on FamilyLife Today and talk with her about what took place in her first marriage around pornography.”

Vicki and her current husband were married in 1999. They have three children. She is a homeschooling mom and a women’s ministry coordinator at her local church. She speaks all around the country. Her book is entitled When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography.

Bob: And if our listeners haven’t figured it out by now, the reason we started off by talking about the issue of divorce is because, after years of working—trying to address this issue in your marriage—and it was never addressed.

Dennis: Well, in fact, what happened was—you confronted your husband on three different occasions, at least. He didn’t respond on any one of those three occasions; right?

Vicki: That’s right. That’s right.

Dennis: What ended up being the line in the sand, where you felt like, “I’ve got to do something,”?

Vicki: You know what? There was just so much evidence that this wasn’t going to stop. It was escalating in degree of severity. It was to the point where physically, emotionally, and spiritually, I was in danger. I was concerned for my health and my daughter’s health in the things that were being introduced to our home. I talked to my pastor. I talked to my counselor. I, actually, talked to my in-laws because we lived near them. They tried to talk to him too.

We really followed that Matthew 18:15 principle of confrontation and followed it very closely. In fact, the first step I probably repeated many, many times before I brought somebody else in because I really didn’t tell anyone what was going on for the very longest time. In fact, my family had no idea until I was ready to leave.

Bob: You shared with us that you sensed, early in the marriage, almost from the honeymoon, that there was some sexual brokenness here—that three months into the marriage, you found evidence of that. That evidence began to multiply and accumulate. You said you began to fear for your health, your safety, your physical safety?
Vicki: Right. Well, with sexual addiction, for many people, it does escalate to—there are different levels of sexual addition. It can escalate up to where you have physical manifestations, not just pornography—that would be Level Two. Level Three becomes criminal behavior. Level Four is violent criminal behavior. While he wasn’t at Level Four, he certainly had moved up to these other levels.

Bob: Level Two would be adultery.

Vicki: Right.

Bob: Level Three—when you talk about criminal behavior, you’re talking about solicitation/prostitution—those kinds of things.

Vicki: Exactly.

Dennis: Well, there’s also the issue of sexually-transmitted diseases.

Vicki: And that’s why I was in danger. I was concerned that he was with someone else and that he was going to be bringing that home.

Dennis: Around the subject—and this is, obviously, incredibly intimate—but as you began to confront him, how would you handle—I mean, you started finding out that—yes, he had been with other women. Did you completely shut yourself down, physically, in terms of availability?

Vicki: I shared that—from the very beginning, intimacy was an issue. There was that brokenness and a lack of interest on his part. I always considered the fact that I was expecting a child kind of miraculous. Once that happened, there really was no further reason for him to be intimate with me. That wasn’t my desire. That was just convenient for him; and because it was during that time that his behaviors escalated even more, it wasn’t my lack of availability—it was his lack of interest.

Dennis: What would you say to a woman, who is in a marriage, where she is wondering about some of these things? What would your counsel be to her?

Vicki: If she is concerned that he is taking intimacy outside and has defiled the marriage bed—and there is any concern of that—she has got to physically be protecting herself. I think that there is a time to declare a sexual fast—and for both of you, then, to take that to the Lord and be, hopefully, working on this. Again, that’s the ideal. The ideal is that he is struggling with this issue.

In Genesis 32, Jacob has an all-night wrestling match with God. In the morning, he is standing again after his fall—he is standing, but he walks with a limp. His brother Esau
comes running to meet him and doesn’t limp at all. I used to struggle with that. Now, I think: “You know what? When women find out their husbands are struggling with an addiction and he’s confessed that to her, she needs to thank God for that spiritual take down because, then, you know that God is working in his life and that he’s, hopefully, going to recover from this.” But the rest of the world doesn’t struggle with this. They just go limp, and they continue in the behavior. The good guys struggle.

Bob: So when you left—at three-and-a-half years, taking your daughter with you—did you have hope that, maybe in leaving, that would bring him to rock bottom and he would turn around?

Vicki: You know, I think by then, I knew that there had never been an inkling, even, of repentance or desire for restoration. So, no, I think I had completely gotten to the point of no hope before I left. I hung in a lot longer than even my pastor or Christian counselor counseled me to hang in there.

Bob: And what were you thinking about the turn your life had taken?—and God?—and—I mean, this was not what you had dreamed of all your life. What was going on in your heart?

Vicki: You know what? My identity in Christ was so damaged, at that point. I was this naïve little girl, who grew up on the hog farm—and now, living in a bigger city—and really, “Was I that naïve?” And you know, I do have to own that I probably had some intimacy issues that needed to be worked out, but that doesn’t allow for pornography.

In the end, we’re all responsible for our own choices. There are times that I can go back, and look at my situation, and say, “I could have done this better.” But I think all of us do the best we can with the information that we have at the time, and that’s what I did.

Bob: I want to draw attention to the fact, then—you said this—when you left at three-and-a-half years, it was longer than your pastor had counseled you to stay. I think it’s important to know you were not just making a decision on your own here. You had sought godly counsel. You were having godly men speak into your life and say to you, “No, you need, for your own safety and protection, to step away from this.”

I bring that up, Dennis, because so many times, I think, decisions like a separation or a divorce are made in a vacuum—by a hurt person, who is making decisions in the framework of that hurt—rather than getting objective, wise, spiritual, godly counsel about, “What do I do in this situation?”

Dennis: Isolation is not your friend—isolation is an enemy in this situation. You have to find some people who will give you the advice from the Scriptures that you need to
hear—not what you want to hear—and counsel you toward the direction—hopefully and ideally, toward reconciliation and restoration of the relationship.

We live in a real world, as we talked about in the beginning, where even Jesus recognized there is a hardness of the heart—where two imperfect people can’t work it out. In those situations, yes, as much as we hate it, infidelity means there is a basis for divorce in that situation. That was what you moved toward at that point. Were you able to make that decision in clear conscience and with godly counselors around you?

Vicki: I was, but I can’t tell you that I slept well after that. That was truly the most difficult decision I probably have ever had to make in my life. I didn’t have a history of divorce—nobody I knew was divorced. We didn’t have family friends who divorced. Even though that was becoming more the norm, culturally, it wasn’t the norm in my life. The “D” word just never, ever crossed my mind. So, in the end, I knew I had to go. I knew that that was really the only course of action. I never had a peace about it—not yet.

I think, really, when I lost everything—when I lost my marriage, when I lost financial security, when I lost a husband, but also a father for my child, who was going to be there, day in and day out—when I lost all of those things is when I really, really discovered that I had to cling to Jesus and that He could get me through this. He knew what betrayal felt like—God gets this. God knows what it is to make a covenant promise with a group of people who, then, turn their backs and choose to love someone else.

Dennis: And you quote Malachi, Chapter 2, where it says, “I (God) hate divorce.” You said you understand—now, having been through this—why God hates it. It’s a traumatic deal. It’s not God’s first choice—He doesn’t want that. He doesn’t want us to get a divorce. He loves divorcees—He loves people, who even have broken their promise.

Vicki: That’s right; yes.

Dennis: And one of the things that you dip into is a controversial subject. You talk about forgiveness of your husband when he may not be repentant. Explain what you wrote in your book and why you put it there.

Vicki: Let me tell you this. One thing that I’ve seen—over, and over, and over again—are women who forgive quickly because they believe that’s the Christian thing to do. As a godly woman and a woman of the church: “I have to forgive him right away because God says I have to forgive. So, that’s what I’m going to do.” Then, they carry around this big pornography club—that they hold over their husband’s head—and they bring it up all the time. They are the porn police. They are digging through all this stuff. They are doing things that are natural for a woman to do; and yet, they don’t reflect forgiveness.
So often, what happens—if the woman does say, right away, “I forgive you for this,” he thinks he has a clean slate. If he really has a pornography issue and if he doesn’t want to work on it, he sees this as the Get-out-of-jail-free card: “She said, ‘I forgive you.’ Now, the next time she brings it up, I’m going to remind her that she said she forgave me.”

I encourage women to really do the hard work so that, when you forgive, it is true from-the-tips-of-your-toes forgiveness, and you’re not holding that club over his head anymore. So even if he is continuing to engage in that pornography / if he is making bad choices, when you’re demonstrating a spirit of forgiveness, there’s that tenderness—there’s that, “I want you to know that as soon as you’re ready to come to me, I’m right here, waiting for us to have full restoration.”

Bob: I have always appreciated our friends at Peacemaker Ministries, who deal with this whole issue of forgiveness and restoration. They have the four promises of forgiveness that they talk about:

The first is: “If you’re really forgiving somebody, one of the promises you’re making is, ‘I won’t dwell on this incident.’”

The second is: “I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.” If you’ve forgiven somebody, that means, “It’s in the past.”

Dennis: It doesn’t mean you don’t think about it—

Bob: No, it just means you don’t use it as a hatchet anymore.

Dennis: —that would mean you’re inhuman. Only God can remember our sins no more.

Bob:

This is the third one: “I will not talk to others about this incident.” In other words, “I’m not going to go out and get all my girlfriends together and say, ‘Yes, I’ve forgiven him; but...’” You know how that works.

And then, “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”

When we talk about real forgiveness—from your toes, like you were saying—this is the kind of forgiveness you’re talking about. That is not just a quick, “Oh, well, never mind,” but a gritty, hard, determined, purposeful, God-like forgiveness.
**Dennis:** In summary of that, Bob, I think forgiveness, ultimately, means we give up the right to punish the other person. It’s why—kind of a second half or the other side of the coin where you talk about forgiveness—you say that you should withhold forgiveness where there isn’t repentance. In other words, in order for forgiveness to be realized, that person must ask, must come, and repent, wanting to be forgiven; correct?

**Vicki:** Correct. Here’s the thing—the greater person that they need to be going to for repentance isn’t me or the wife—it’s Jesus. There is an obstacle in their way between their relationship with Christ. He, too, is standing, ready to forgive. He says, “Repent and come to Me,”—that’s what He is waiting for as well. I think that’s important, and that’s a biblical way to handle that.

At the same time, again, when they’re continuing in that sin—you stand ready to forgive—you have dealt with the anger, you’ve dealt with the fear, and you’ve dealt with your tendency to control or to try to manipulate his healing. So many of us, women, have that desire. First, we blame ourselves and, then, we try to fix him. We try to control how he’s going to work on this addiction. So, when we’ve dealt with all of those things, we’re in a much better position to behave in a forgiving manner toward our husband.

**Bob:** You still have to love your enemies.

**Vicki:** Right.

**Bob:** The Bible says that—you have to show mercy. You have to give a blessing in return for evil. These are all things that—whether we talk about forgiveness in a transactional vein, as you [Vicki] talk about it / or just giving up the right to punish, as you [Dennis] talk about it—even if we say, “He’s got to be ready to repent before I can forgive him,” you still have to bless him, you still have to pray for him, you still have to not speak evil against him. There are a lot of commands in Scripture about how you are to live out with the one who you are opposed to in that moment; right?

**Vicki:** That’s exactly right. I talk a lot about not behaving in a vengeful manner—vengeance isn’t for the wife. That’s not going to encourage healing in the relationship whatsoever. Undeserved forgiveness makes you look more like Jesus. There may be a time—there are some women who feel like this isn’t deserved / he’s not sorry enough about this—and yet, that’s not for you to determine. If he’s coming to you and he’s asking for forgiveness, then that’s when you have to grant that. The thing is—this is an addiction—so there are going to be slips or relapses. A relapse is, I think, a full-throttle doing it all again; but a slip is a slight lapse in progress. You’re going to have those happen. You’re going to have to learn, sometimes, to have daily forgiveness when there is a slip or an indiscretion.

**Dennis:** Healing and restoration doesn’t occur in a vacuum. We said it earlier in this broadcast—you’re not going to be able to handle a crisis like this alone. You have to be
surrounded by other men who become accountability partners with your husband. You have to be surrounded with godly counsel for the wife, who is being coached and encouraged, at points, where there is a slip. There’s wisdom to provide grace, and get back up, and stay on the journey because we are imperfect. We need that grace and forgiveness, first and foremost, from God—but we don’t live it out perfectly.

Vicki, I really appreciate your sharing your story, here, with our listeners. I think this devotional that you’ve written for wives, who find themselves in a situation like this—I think it’s going to be really helpful to them to begin to process what they’ve experienced and to help them become the women God wants them to be. Thanks for writing it.

Vicki: Thank you.

Bob: I think what you’ve done in the book and, really, what you’ve done, here today on FamilyLife Today, is you’ve given women a picture—you’ve coached them from your own experience and from what you’ve learned from God’s Word—about how to respond to your husband’s sin in a way that most honors God / that represents Christ to your husband.

I want to encourage our listeners—if this is something that you are facing or if you know someone who is facing this kind of an issue, get a copy of Vicki’s book, When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography. We have it in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can request a copy, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, order online at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get a copy of the book, When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography.

Our hope is that whatever issues you face, as a couple—whether it is pornography or any issue that comes your way—you know how to press toward one another and pursue oneness in marriage—how to confess / how to grant forgiveness—things we talk about at the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. We try to provide couples there with practical biblical help for how to make a marriage work. We try to give couples hope, especially if your marriage is in a difficult spot. So whether you’re in a good place in your marriage or whether you’re facing challenges, why don’t you plan to join us this spring at a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway?

When you sign up this weekend—this is the last opportunity you’ve got to take advantage of the special offer we’re making where you pay the regular rate for yourself and your spouse comes free. Take advantage of the special offer and get in touch with us at FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FLTODAY to join us at a spring Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. Hope to see you there.

And with that, we have to wrap things up for this week. Thanks for joining us. Hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family can worship together in church this weekend.
I hope you can join us back on Monday when we’re going to talk about real love—not the hearts and the flowers / the romantic love—I mean, that’s good—but we want to talk about the gritty kind of 1 Corinthians 13 love. Barbara Rainey will be here to help us talk about that. Hope you can join us as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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