

ADDICTED...To Life

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

Someone once said that a habit is doing something that you enjoy on a regular basis, but when you find out it is unhealthy or bad, you stop doing it. Addiction on the other hand is doing something you enjoy on a frequent basis, but when you find out it is unhealthy or bad, you make excuses and continue doing it.

Would it surprise you to know that most people are addicted to something? Wikipedia gives an interesting description of addiction: "Habits and patterns associated with addiction are typically characterized by immediate gratification (short-term reward), coupled with delayed deleterious effects (long-term) costs."

Although there are more destructive and varying degrees of addiction than others, in reality, an addiction can be implicated by any pattern that compromises the health of the body or soul to obtain immediate gratification. For instance, a food addiction could simply mean making an inferior food choice over a more healthy superior food choice simply because it tastes better or satisfies a craving.

However, the insidious nature of addiction takes on a much darker tone. The pain and misery brought on mankind as a result of health destroying addictions has an untold measure. With increasing worldly socioeconomic and moral decline, crime is on the rise along with suicide, drug abuse, food, and alcohol addictions. And then to compound the problem, people see the simple pleasures of eating as a way to escape from it all, eating to excess, and ultimately adding to the pain of sickness and disease.

From the time of Adam to that of Christ, self-indulgence had increased the power of the appetites and passions, until they had almost unlimited control. Thus men had become debased and diseased, and of themselves it was impossible for them to overcome. In man's behalf, Christ conquered by enduring the severest test. For our sake, he exercised a self-control stronger than hunger or death." E.G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 117

The most powerful temptation that Satan felt he could throw at Jesus was on the point of appetite. After all, the enemy had used the seduction of appetite before with great success through the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Fortunately, in our behalf, Jesus victoriously conquered in this difficult test during His 40-day fast in the wilderness. Just as sin came into the world through the indulgence of appetite, Jesus had to stem the tide of disease and addiction over the same temptation. He knew the struggles we would be faced with, and it was His purpose to leave us with an example of hope that we may be overcomers as well through the power of God and the strength of our own will.

The Nature of Addiction

An imperceptible beginning

The invisible chains of a bad habit or addiction are generally weak in the beginning and rarely felt--until, by repeated actions, they gain in strength and cannot be broken by human power alone. And just as the power of the addiction takes root, the strength of the will becomes atrophied through inaction, until the addiction becomes the ruling force.

As the addiction gains in momentum, the willpower, self-esteem, and confidence of the individual in their own resolutions, promises, and ability to make changes and to stop the destruction, slowly starts to fade, until the life is totally out of control.

Three years ago my family went through a very difficult time, as we lost my only brother, John, to liver failure. He was only 47-years-old. He was an alcoholic from the age of 16. Throughout his troubled life, he always felt that he could handle his addiction and quit any time he wanted. The trouble is, he didn't quit. Finally, after years of abusing his liver, he developed hepatitis C. Even then, he still found himself unable to quit, and he continued to drink until the damage was irreversible. John came home from the hospital to die surrounded by his family and two teenage daughters, who meant the world to him. Without the power of God, John was helpless against an addiction that had robbed him of everything he held precious. Although I have been given the assurance that I will see John again one day, the thought of what his life could have been without the insidious pain and addiction that ultimately controlled his life continues to haunt me.

The character of addiction, unique to each person, has the same agenda---it exerts a controlling force on the life and the fruit is destruction. Making promises and resolutions no longer has meaning, and despair is the end result.

Many are inquiring, "How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?" You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you.

If you have felt the desperation of losing confidence in your own ability to make and keep a promise, a decision, or a resolution, take heart. If the knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges has weakened your confidence in your own sincerity, you're not alone. If you feel that, because of the decisions you have made in your life and the many times you've ended back at square one, you feel that God cannot accept you, don't despair.

I'm sure when Jesus walked on earth He saw the degradation of sin and disease. He witnessed the degeneracy of the human race in the leper, the blind, the crippled, and the demoniac. There is nothing in your life that will startle or astonish His acute perceptions; nothing too dark in your life He has not seen or witnessed before; nothing He cannot heal—or forgive. "It was a continual pain to Christ to be brought into contact with enmity, depravity, and impurity; but never did He utter one expression to show that His sensibilities were shocked or His refined tastes offended. Whatever the evil habits, the strong prejudices, or the overbearing passions of human beings, He met them all with pitying tenderness."

Whatever struggle you may be going through, it can be overcome through the power of God. If you doubt His willingness, look at the example of His life. His mission to this earth was to seek and save the lost. "For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard" Ps 22:24.

"Yet however great the struggle, he may overcome. By the help of that divine power which withstood the fiercest temptations that Satan could invent, he too may be entirely successful in his warfare with evil, and at last may wear the victor's crown in the kingdom of God." Counsels on Diet and Foods, p 167"

Steps To Freedom

Freedom comes with a price, but that price has already been paid.

1. Acknowledge your desperate need of the Savior and Great Physician. Before God can begin to work in the life, we have to first admit our great need. God never turns away from a sincere call for help. Unfortunately, the call for help many times comes after all other resources are completely exhausted. If you find yourself dangling at the end of your rope; if you have selfishly brushed Him aside time and time again; if you have been on self-destruct for many years and destroyed every good thing in your life—You're the lost sheep that the Great Shepherd came to save.

2. Overcome bad with good. A good habit is a powerful tool and will many times protect one from bad habits. Someone once said, "You can't do a good thing and a bad thing at the same time." With that in mind, filling the minutes of your day with purposeful activities will go a long ways in keeping you on track. The best habit I can think of to set the tone for the day, is to begin each day in meditation and prayer. Through prayer, God will work to restore your accountability to Him, to yourself, and to others. God's work of restoration in your life will be as the sweet healing balm of Gilead to your soul.

3. Admit to yourself and to God that you are powerless to overcome. Without this acknowledgement, we could unwittingly go into battle without our armour, sword, shield, or helmet. God understands our human weakness as well as the fact that we are in a spiritual warfare with forces way out of our league. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places." Because of this, in order to obtain the victory, we must "put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Eph 6:11, 12)

4. Acknowledge God's claim on you as your Creator and redeemer. God has two really big reasons why we should entrust our lives into His care. The first reason is because He created us. The second reason is because He rescued and redeemed us from the clutches of sin by dying in our place. If this doesn't have a huge impact on your life, perhaps the living sacrifice He became for us as He walked among man might. It was during those 33 years he could have been in heaven where He was adored by millions rather than mocked; where He commanded worlds of beings who hung on His every word—but we spat upon Him, betrayed Him, and ultimately crucified Him. He placed His stamp of ownership on us through creation, yet He had to repurchase an ungrateful world with His blood. What greater act of love known to man?

5. Submit your will to God. "God gives the talents; the powers of the mind; man makes the character." (Ellen White) God has given to each man a measure of talents, but God leaves it up to us what we want to make of those talents. Our character is decided, either good or bad, by the choices we make. God

has given the power to choose to each man and woman. He desires that we will serve him willingly, without force or coercion. A heart of love (His heart) desires a heart of love (our heart). A mere service of force is simply not enough for him. The day will come when the entire world will bow down and acknowledge Him as Lord, Creator, and King of Kings (Romans 14:11), but today God asks us to “choose ye this day whom ye will serve, and let it be the Lord.” (Josh 24:15)

6. Forgive yourself and others for the past. I remember a man giving his testimonial on a stop smoking commercial many years ago. He was boasting about the fact that he had finally kicked the cigarette habit. He said, “For the years that he had been smoking, he calculated the money spent on cigarettes would have paid for two of the houses he was currently living in.” That had to hurt. You may be looking at similar pages of regret. God does not willingly punish. He desires to restore the fullness of life in each person who will allow Him to. The past cannot be changed, but one thing can be changed—God promises to wipe the slate clean when we come before Him confessing our sins and our unworthiness. He promises to cast our sins into the depths of the sea, to remember them no more, Micah 7:19. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” Psalms 103:12. Like me, there may be things from your past that you want to forget. What a generous God we serve that he is willing to cast every sin from our past into the depths of the sea to be remembered no more. The Bible says “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). I heard a preacher say one day in a sermon that there are four things that God does not know---1) He does not know a sin he does not hate; 2) He does not know a sinner He does not love; 3) He does not know a sin He cannot forgive; and 4) He does not know a better time than now.

Just as God’s mercy and forgiveness have been graciously extended to us, we must do the same to others. If there is someone who has caused you pain or wronged you in some way, remember that forgiving others is a gift you give yourself. It is through the act of forgiveness that we gain emotional freedom. I have witnessed bitter lives of people who were locked behind the pain and suffering of an unforgiving heart. Many people feel justified in harboring the hurt and the pain. However, the one most affected by the unforgiving spirit is rarely the other person. For anyone we do not or cannot forgive, we remain in bondage to--their emotional prisoner. By giving this person and situation to God daily through prayer, He can and will replace your pain and bitterness with a spirit of forgiveness. Through this spirit of forgiveness and love, healing of body, mind, and soul is then possible.

7. Commit your life to God and to His care. There is no other way through the pain of addiction. God is our Creator—and we are His creation. Who better to trust and commit your life to than the one who created you and loved you enough to die for you? Without that commitment, however, He stands by helplessly watching and waiting. Force is never a part of His plan. It’s the heart He wants. Nothing else

will do. As you commit your life to Him, He can go to work in your life. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...." 2 Cor 12:9

8. Persevere through adversity. God loves to see His children persevere in prayer. Not because he isn't willing and desirous of granting our wishes immediately. His desire, however, is to develop the habit of persistence in our life. The more we pray for something, the greater our desire, and the more we're willing to do our part. The perfect example of perseverance in the face of adversity in the Bible is found in the story of Job. Everything possible that could go wrong in a man's life did go wrong. He lost almost everything dear to him, except his life. His health was gone, his children had been killed, he lost his worldly wealth, and then his friends added their advice to the temptation to just give up and curse God. Even his own wife had lost her faith. But Job, God's faithful servant, stayed faithful to the end. He said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15) We know of course that God didn't destroy Job. On the contrary, as Job persevered in his faith, God prospered Job even more than before.

9. Persevere through prosperity. I have discovered in my own life one of the greatest hindrances to success---is success itself. Just as things seem to be going well, whether consciously or unconsciously, I have found myself throwing out that independent message, "Thank you, God---but I've got this now." Peter, the disciple, had this same problem. As Peter was allowed to walk on water to meet the Savior, he took his eyes off of Jesus and thus began to sink. (Matt 14:30)

Solomon, son of King David, was one of the most majestic kings in the Bible. When he first began his reign, God appeared to him in a dream or a vision and basically gave Solomon a blank check. God asked Solomon what He should do for him. In response, Solomon acted wisely. He asked God for wisdom and understanding to rule the people. God was pleased with Solomon's answer, and because of it, He gave much more to Solomon than he asked. God granted not only Solomon's request, but he also bestowed untold riches on Solomon, who became the richest and most powerful man on earth. But in time, Solomon started slipping. Unlike his father, David, who loved and worshipped God throughout his life, Solomon forgot God. He married women of heathen nations and eventually erected false Gods to worship. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father." I Kings 11:48 Because of the choices Solomon made, God withdrew His favor from Solomon. What a great beginning this majestic king had. If only Solomon had persevered in his walk with God. What a difference this would have made to so many.

10: Claim God's promises: When people claim God's promises, it becomes an act of faith that honors God. The reason is because while we're claiming God's promises, we're choosing to look past

circumstances, no matter how dismal or bleak. Instead of allowing circumstances to determine one's level of faith, we're placing our faith in God and believing it because He said it. God answers this honor with His honor. He loves it when we claim His promises. God desires us to come boldly to the throne of grace, because He knows this is where we will find mercy. Hebrews 4:16