

Addictions come in all shapes and sizes, from shopping to sexual addiction to drug use. For Daniel, it started with a seemingly natural teenage curiosity, but later in life his addiction to porn nearly destroyed his marriage. Candace's addiction to sex had led her into more sexual encounters than she could remember by the age of 21. Ryan's craving for marijuana left him unmotivated for anything else in life for 13 years, including time with his family. Judith's fibromyalgia led her to an addiction to pain meds. Simone's addiction to shopping cost destroyed her two-year relationship with the man she loved. Miki's food addiction led her on an endless cycle of dieting failure and health problems. After twenty years sober, Stacie relapsed into alcohol abuse until it nearly left her hopeless.

These true stories are not unique. The fact is, most of us have addictions. Whether they are guilty pleasures or seemingly innocent, all of us have an addictive personality. We all have a void within us that we strive to fill with different things and yet these things only seem to bring temporary satisfaction. Whether it is shopping, video games, movies, drugs, pornography, smoking, coffee, gambling, or some other vice, we are all just trying to fill the void. The problem arises when we stop striving for a purpose driven life and instead seek pleasure to give our lives purpose instead of seeking purpose to give our lives pleasure.

### *Attempting the Impossible*

While all of us have certain things in our lives that can turn into addictions, we must specifically be cautious of those things that are chemically or psychologically addictive which damage our lives and relationships, like alcohol, pornography, gambling, lying, drugs (including marijuana), and other vices which gain control over us. When I used to smoke cigarettes I remember at times running out and having panic attacks in the middle of the night because I had no more cigarettes. I knew then that I didn't control smoking. It controlled me.

Is there something in your life that you can't imagine living without? When we find ourselves unable to live without certain vices then they begin to own us and we need to break free, but this is easier said than done. While many are in denial about their problems, there are also many people

who realize they have a problem and want to quit. If you realize your problem, there is hope. There is a way out and some of the steps outlined below can help you overcome your addiction, but the first step is to recognize that you have a problem. If you have not gotten to this step, pray to God and ask Him to reveal your problem to you. He will show you.

Once you recognize that you have a problem, you must then recognize your helplessness to defeat it on your own. When I realized I was helpless to overcome my addiction to cigarettes and I cried out to God, He gave me the power to quit. Whatever our vice is, one key to quitting is admitting our weakness and helplessness. Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We must admit that on our own overcoming any sin is impossible on our own, but that does not mean we do not continue making the effort to quit. While it is impossible, we are told "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). We must attempt the impossible, trusting that God will give us the power. When we say, "God, I can't do this, but I am going to try anyway and let you do this in me," we are walking by faith.

Do you remember the story where Jesus walked on the water. Peter called out to Jesus, "If that's you, command me to come out to you on the water." Jesus replied, "Come," and Peter walked to Jesus on the water (Matt. 14:29). Peter did the impossible because He had faith in the word of Jesus. This is the key. The Bible says we are "saved by faith" and we must "stand by faith" and "walk by faith" (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 11:20; 2 Cor. 5:7). When we believe God will supply us with the power to do the impossible, then we step out by faith.

### *Surrender for Survival*

There are countless war stories of soldiers whose only chance of survival was to surrender. It's the same with getting victory over our vices. We must surrender, not to the vice, but to God. We must turn the steering wheel of our lives over to God and say, "Okay, I've tried things my way and it didn't work. Now I'm ready for you to drive my life." Surrender is a key to victory. It is giving up our will to God saying, "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). When we surrender our will to God, He takes over.

The key to breaking the chains in our lives does not come through personal strength and self will, but through prayer and surrendering our will to God. You see, the Bible says that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but...against spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). The devil and his angels seek to hold us in the chains of addiction and Satan is too strong to defeat on our own. We must have a power from above. That's why the victory does not come by fighting, but on our knees through prayer. When we learn to constantly pray for God's power, we will find strength.

In addition to prayer, fast. Jesus once said, "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21). While fasting often refers to abstaining from food for a certain period of time, it does not necessarily refer to food. If you are addicted to drugs, alcohol, or junk food, do a food fast. This will help clean out your system and clear your mind, but if you are addicted to social media, do a media fast. This will help restore mental clarity. Give up internet, television, and even music devices for a day or a week or a month.

### *Practical Tips*

There are also many practical things we can do to get the victory over addiction. Cut off associations with people who lead you into temptation (Jas. 4:4). Replace bad friends with good friends by joining a support group. Avoid any situation which may draw you into temptation, making "no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). Get rid of things in your life that open doors to temptation. Jesus said, "if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off" (Matt. 5:29). That means, if addicted to porn, get rid of the internet and certain movies. If addicted to shopping, cut up the credit cards.

It is not enough to give up things, you must also replace bad habits with good. Jesus told a story of a man who emptied his house of an evil spirit, but didn't fill it back up with good things, so "seven other spirits more wicked" returned and filled the house (Matt. 12:45). The point is, don't just stop doing bad things, but replace bad things with good things. If you are an addict, volunteer with an addiction recovery ministry. Get involved. Also make health changes. If you are overcoming drugs,

alcohol, or some form of physical addiction, try a healthy vegetarian diet along with starting up an exercise routine.

### *Time for Victory*

It's time to defeat your demons, overcome your addictions, and start dreaming again! Start living the life that God planned for you. God has great plans for you, "thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11). Those plans are still waiting for you if you will give control to Jesus, but if you try it on your own, your best laid plans will not satisfy. The fight against addiction is on your knees in prayer. Won't you pray with me right now. Say to God, "Father, I have sinned against you and I am helpless to stop, but you have promised to save me from this. I can't do it, but you can, so I give my life to you and ask you to make the necessary changes in me and save me from myself and my addiction," then get up and live like you believe it. You may fall, but don't stay down because "a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again" (Prov. 25\4:16). In fact, Jesus said we may fall "seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22) and still have forgiveness and peace, so keep getting up until God gives you the victory.

There is a story in the Bible of a persistent friend who keeps asking his neighbor for help until the neighbor finally gives in "because of his persistence" (Luke 11:8). Jesus said this to encourage us to pray with persistence and never give up. God's promise is, "ask, and it will be given to you" (Luke 11:9). Pray to God, asking and striving one step at a time, trusting that He will finally give you the victory if you persist in faith, so get out and start putting the things that you just read into practice.

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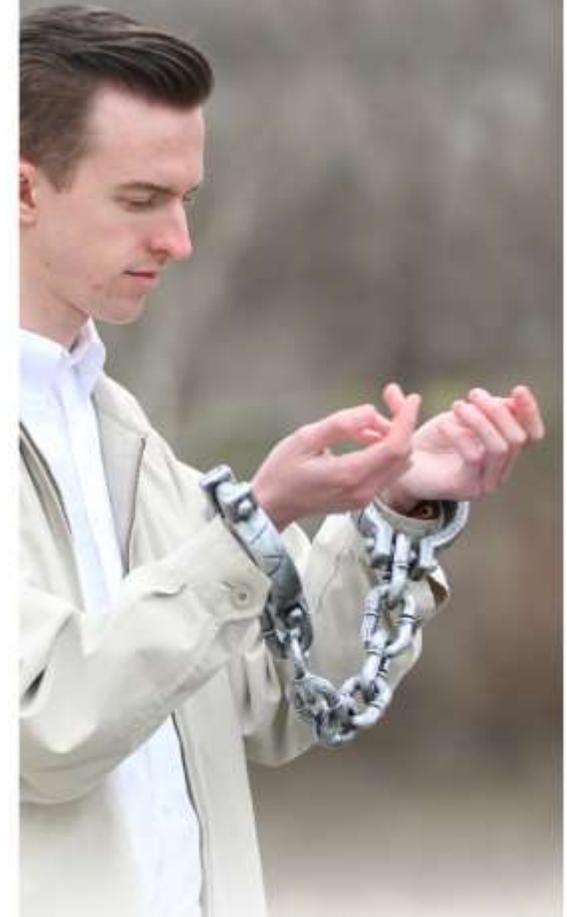
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# Breaking Free



*Break the chains that are holding you down!*