

Untethered

Deliverance from Addiction

Does Anything but God Control Your Life?

When I first started college, one of my closest friends from high school ended up in the hospital. I was shocked to discover that he had overdosed on LSD and nearly died. I did not even know he used drugs, let alone hard narcotics. There was a small group of us that hung out together and Randy never told any of us about his drug usage. It turned out that he started smoking marijuana which led to him using harder and more addictive illegal drugs. Six months later he was dead from a drug overdose. We never knew for certain, but the rumor was that he committed suicide. You perhaps don't suffer from any addictions. You have never battled addiction, and this topic may not seem pertinent to you. I hope however that God will use this message for your benefit and for the good of those you love. This is our big idea. Do not let your freedom in Christ be a barrier to you living for Christ.

We will use this working definition of addiction for the message today. Addiction is any longing that damages your life and your relationship with yourself, with God and those you influence and love. I had a friend who was taking a particular pain medication for his back, but he took it so often that he began to crave it physically and psychologically and it wrecked his relationship with his family members and nearly took his life. Most of us never get to that point but I receive prayer requests from Christians around the world who have family members ruining themselves because of addictions. I had another friend who loved the Lord and wanted to go into full time Christian ministry, but his previous alcohol addiction came back and nearly destroyed his marriage and his faith in God. The Bible has this warning regarding wine and beer. **Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.** (Proverbs 20: 1 NIV) In a text that perfectly uses the metaphor of wine as a way of picturing the psychological and spiritual effect of addiction on the soul, the Bible gives this commentary. **Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!** (Proverbs 23:29-31 NIV) Addiction results in a lingering over the object of its desire despite the destruction already experienced by it. In this case, the alcoholic here has a history of drinking too much wine and has experienced the damage it has caused and yet still can't get his mind off the wine. It is the lingering when the alarm bells are going off in the head of the danger there we want to discuss. Let me illustrate this with the historical account of Eve I mentioned last time.

We know that Eve was tricked by Satan into eating the forbidden fruit but notice the psychological pattern often found in addiction. **When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.** (Genesis 3: 6a NIV) The Hebrew tense used to describe her seeing the fruit and that it was pleasing to the eye is imperfect which describes something ongoing, something that lasts over a period of time. In other words, her eyes and thoughts were lingering over the forbidden fruit. She kept her mind on it and would not look away. That is the DNA of addiction, it is a mind game first and foremost. The mind stays transfixed by the object of its destructive desire. Imagine a cheetah, gazing down upon a crocodile lounging in the afternoon sun. The cheetah can't stop thinking about what a great meal that crocodile would be, how tasty its flesh is. The entire time, the cheetah is aware that if she attacks the crocodile, she most likely would be the crocodile's dinner rather than the other way around. Addiction is the psychological desire for something that in the end most likely would bring disaster.

Let's take a look at a grotesque example of addiction and then explore how addiction is an evil force all of us must vigorously defend against. David's most famous sin, most egregious abuse of his power as king was when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed. David's later years hinged on how he responded to the temptation of Satan. Turn away and denounce the longing it generated or let that longing grow and develop until it became a powerful force of evil. Of course David chose the latter. **One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,** (2 Samuel 11: 2 NIV) Once again, like with Eve, the Hebrew tense indicates that David not only saw Bathsheba bathing, he could not take his eyes off her. He lingered. What he did next is quite in keeping with addiction. David asked his employees who she was and one recognized her as the wife of a courageous and loyal soldier of David's army. Rather than rejecting the temptation his lingering gaze was fueling, David called for

Bathsheba to be brought to him, and they slept together. Eventually, David ordered the death of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and they were married. However, God sent the prophet Nathan to confront the king about his depravity. Nathan told the story of a poor man who had one tender lamb he loved but a rich man took the lamb from him and had it butchered and served to his guests. David was outraged by the act of greed and cruelty and ordered that the rich man be executed immediately. When Nathan told David he was the one guilty of the terrible crime, David quickly recognized the horrific nature of his sin and repented. What is striking is that David, for all his lust and cruelty, knew full well how terrible it was in others, but his addiction blinded him to the evil in his own actions. That is how addiction works spiritually. Its laser focused longing keeps you from realizing how wrong you are even though you may know it is not right in theory and when found in others. Addiction is the force Satan uses to keep you from feeling guilty for your sins and pushes you to rebel against God with greater determination.

Here is what addiction is as a spiritual force of evil. It is any lingering distraction that pushes you away from God and holy living. When you are too busy to read your Bible, that is addiction. When you don't have enough money to tithe, it is due to addiction. If you aren't sharing the Gospel with anyone, it is addiction. When you won't forgive, it is due to addiction and those who are not a part of a faithful Christian community, giving their all to worshipping God and fellowshiping with and supporting His people and the work of ministry, it is addiction. Addiction is the pull away from God and the longings that drain you of any real desire to live wholeheartedly for Him. The human centered field of psychology calls addiction a disease. Addiction is actually a longing that is nurtured by human lust which pushes you away from God and faithful living. Let me share an example from ancient Israel of addiction from the Christian perspective. After Jerusalem had been destroyed, most of the people were killed or brought to Babylon and the Temple of God leveled, the Jews began a slow trickle back to Jerusalem over the course of almost two hundred years. They rebuilt homes, planted fields and started to reestablish trade with the neighboring countries. One thing they did not do. They did not bother rebuilding the Temple of God. The Lord had this to say about their attempts to become successful. **You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.**" (Haggai 1: 6 NIV) The Jews were working hard but getting nowhere. God was holding them back because they were doing nothing to rebuild the Temple. Notice this stern rebuke by God. **This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord. "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.** (Haggai 1: 7-9 NIV) Addiction has two characteristics. It weakens your loyalty to God and is fueled by a longing that wrecks your life. In this case, the Jews were so interested in making a living that they had no passion for God or honoring His name with their lives. The result was the Lord stripped them of the very object of their desires: success and wealth.

David, when he realized the evil of his addiction and how far from God he had grown, took five very practical and effective steps to get back his life with God and realign himself with what is right and good for himself and his family. This is how David battled addiction. 1. He refocused on God. His attention became zeroed in on the LORD and what He wanted. 2. David experienced genuine sorrow. The sadness over his sin was real and profound. He described it as an aching in his bones and a great bitterness of soul. **My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.** (Psalm 38: 4 NIV) Rarely if ever does addiction get beaten if there is not deep sorrow over what it has caused. 3. Fasting. David fasted because he was hoping the Lord would restore to health the child he fathered out of wedlock with Bathsheba. Fasting is a powerful way to regain your priorities when you have lost your way with God. 4. Repentance. Repentance is much more than feeling badly for what you have done. It is a determination to turn and make God the top priority of your life. If you do not actually begin to do what you know God wants you to do, you have not repented. The clear sign of real repentance is a change in behavior and a real desire to make things right. 5. You by faith believe God will transform you as you let Him have His way with you. The perfect you is being developed as Jesus Christ builds His life in you and that happens as you unhook yourself from every longing that goes against following Him with all your heart. Here is our big idea. Do not let your freedom in Christ be a barrier to you living for Christ. This is what Paul said about living a rich and fulfilling life and it holds true for you also. Do not let your freedom in Christ be a barrier to you living for Christ. **"Everything is permissible"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.** (1 Corinthians 10: 23-24 NIV) Make this week one where you live wholeheartedly for Christ and your loyalty to Him as Lord is unquestioned.