

Freedom From Addiction

By John Woodward

When our family was once stranded along the side of the highway, I learned a bit more about the art of towing. The first tow truck that arrived could not pull our van, since our rear wheel was broken. As we waited for the flat bed truck (which literally carried the whole van to the repair shop), I had a chat with the first driver as waited with us.

I asked him about his towing. My curiosity couldn't resist asking him, "Did you ever get stuck with your tow truck and have to call for a tow yourself?"

"Almost never," he said. "I can use the truck's winch cable to pull myself out if I get stuck; or I can use the lift to push the truck forward." (It sounded like he had to try this sometimes.)

Imagine the frustration and embarrassment of a stuck tow truck driver! Now imagine the plight of the mature Christian who is stuck with an addiction. This believer has a working knowledge of Scripture and wants to help others, yet is bound by besetting sins in his own life. (The use of imagination may not be necessary...)

Many desperately need an effective Christ-centered, grace-oriented strategy to break addictions. For example, a study released in *The Journal of Affective Disorders* concluded that internet addictions are just as strong and destructive as addictions to alcohol, drugs, or gambling. Speaking of gambling, last year Canadians lost a record \$8.1 billion to the gambling industry--a sobering testimony to the damaging effects of compulsive behavior. [1]

How can we as believers say "no" to a stubborn habit? How can we be set free from addictive behavior? Are there answers beyond what secular, psychological, and legalistic methods offer? YES!

In their book, Freedom from Addiction, Mike and Julia Quarles share their saga of Mike's alcohol addiction. Julia says her husband earned a D. D. ("Doctor of Drunkenness") in his efforts to overcome drinking. Mike tried about 30 treatment strategies including: A. A., Christian 12 step groups, psychiatry, psychology, a secular treatment center, a Christian treatment center, willpower, Bible study, prayer, fasting, and the list goes on. After his stay at a residential Christian treatment center, Mike stayed sober for a while. He started counseling alcoholics, but eventually fell back into drinking. He ended up counseling people addicted to alcohol while he was still battling the same foe! As things went from bad to worse, Mike lost his job and his marriage was in jeopardy.

How did Mike finally get free from this addiction? The path to his freedom began when he hit rock bottom; he was disabled by depression, had no money for liquor, and gave up--on himself. He writes, "I had finally exhausted all my resources and options. At my point of spiritual bankruptcy, I was finally ready to let God do what He wanted to do all along. 2 Corinthians 1:8,9 says 'For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia:

that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.' Is there a price for freedom? I, and many others, have found the price tag is to completely give up on myself and come to the end of my resources and find freedom in Christ." [2]

This reminds us of James 4:6,7: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." God promises the needed grace if we let go of our pride and self-sufficiency. The apostle Paul kept encouraging the church with God's abundant grace: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8).

So why were the many methods of breaking addictions ineffective for Mike? Looking back, he points to four basic reasons that they failed: "1) I tried to change my behavior instead of the underlying belief that determined my behavior. 2) I focused on me and what I should do instead of focusing on God and what He had already done. 3) I relied on my own efforts instead of trusting God and living by the power of the Holy Spirit. 4) I accepted a failure identity instead of appropriating my true identity in Christ." [3]

God set Mike free and equipped him for his present ministry as a spiritual counselor by leading him to the realization of the Exchanged Life. As he grasped his union with Christ, his new identity in Christ, and surrendered and rested in Him, Mike experienced Christ as His LIFE. The Lord set him free!

This deliverance is rarely a one time experience; the freedom needs to be maintained by abiding in Christ (John 15:5-8). Strongholds that rob the believer of freedom must be torn down and replaced with truth (John 8:31,32).

Here is Mike Quarles' comparison of Man's answer and God's answer to addiction.

MAN'S ANSWER:

A PROGRAM--Designed to change the behavior of the person (Gal. 4:9)

RESULT--Self-improvement (Gal. 6:3)

NEED--To constantly work on doing the right behavior (Gal. 3:1-5)

DYNAMIC--Our commitment and performance (Col. 2:20-23)

MAN'S ANSWER SUMMARIZED:

COMMITMENT--To subject myself to a program of:

LAW--Rules, steps, concepts and principles through:

WORKS--Disciplined self-effort to:

STRENGTHEN THE FLESH--Improve self in order to produce

DEAD WORKS--Behavior change

GOD'S ANSWER:

THE CROSS--To put to death the person who does the behavior (Rom. 6:4)

RESULT--New person with a new identity who behaves differently (Gal. 2:20)

NEED--To understand who we are so our behavior will match up with our identity (2 Cor. 5:17)

DYNAMIC--The life of Christ (Col. 3:3)

GOD'S ANSWER SUMMARIZED

DEATH--I agree with God's verdict on self and give up on myself and my resources by:

GRACE--Appropriate what God has done by:

FAITH--Appropriate my death and resurrection with Christ by the:

SPIRIT--Depend upon Christ's life in me to meet all my needs in order to produce:

LIFE--Good works, the fruit of the Spirit."[4]

In part 2, we will continue to explore this theme.

If you are stuck in a habit that grieves the Holy Spirit, hurts you, and hinders your potential to help others, may these insights be used of God to give you fresh hope and renewed confidence in your Liberator: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). God can pull you out of any rut!

Part 1 of 4

Notes:

[1] "In the News," April, 2000 - Evangelical Fellowship of Canada <http://www.efc-canada.com>

[2] Freedom from Addiction, by Neil Anderson & Mike and Julie Quarles, Regal Books, p. 107. Visit Mike and Julia's web site at <http://www.freedomfromaddiction.org>

[3] Ibid., 110.

[4] Ibid., 134.

Freedom From Addiction, Part 2

We have been looking into the subject of compulsive behaviors, stubborn habits, and besetting sins. A more contemporary term for such problems is "addiction." When a believer in Christ remains shackled in this way, he/she is missing out on a major benefit of his/her spiritual birthright. Our Lord Jesus stated, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin ... [however] if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:34,36).

What characterizes an addiction? "Alan Lang, in his Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior report to the National Academy of Science, identifies nine such characteristics: Impulsive behavior, Difficulty in delaying gratification, Sensation seeking, Antisocial personality, Nonconformist values, Sense of alienation, Deviant behavior, Heightened feelings of stress, [and] Little regard for goals generally valued by society." [1] Most of us know what an addiction would mean to us personally. It is the compulsive behavior that violates the standard of 1 Corinthians 6:12 "... All things are lawful for me, but I WILL NOT BE BROUGHT UNDER THE POWER OF ANY." And Romans 6:12 admonishes us: "Therefore DO NOT LET SIN REIGN in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." When a behavior robs us of the freedom that God created us to enjoy, it functions as an addiction. [2]

Entertainment such as television, the Internet, and video games are considered okay in moderation, but they also can become addictive. It is too easy to let the media dominate us; instead of "recreation" (refreshing) it becomes "amusement" (literally--"no thinking").

Gaining freedom becomes more complicated when the problem behavior involves something one can't avoid. Take food, for example. Overcoming gluttony is possible, but living without food isn't! Notice the balance: Scripture says that we are NOT to "abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature [food source] of God is good [ethically okay], and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:3,4). Yet, many dieters testify that legitimate enjoyment of food can escalate into emotionally-driven overeating (Prov. 23:21). Are you living to eat or eating to live?

How can we enjoy activities without becoming mesmerized by them? Let's continue to explore God's promises and provision for freedom from addictive behavior.

In part 1 we compared breaking an addiction with getting a car pulled out of a ditch. Let's think of Christ as our source of life as the POWER needed to get out of the "ditch." What power is ours as believers? God's Word assures us, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20,21). Do we REALLY believe this? We should, because it's true! Notice that the preceding verses contain a prayer for strength and enlightenment (vv. 14-19).

We often forget our potential in Christ because we live by FEELINGS instead of FAITH. Memories of past failures are used by the power of sin to discourage us. Instead, our focus needs

to be Christ Himself who lives in us: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ... " because, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 4:13).

Knowing the theology of the deeper life, however, does not guarantee freedom from addictive behavior. In fact, some may have come to taste the abundant life, but have become disillusioned because a resistant problem area did not automatically change. How can Christ in us have supreme power if freedom still seems out of reach?

Maybe our "car in the ditch" needs TRACTION! Let's consider some useful principles that help us harness the power of God and apply it to specific, stubborn habits. Think of these principles as traction boards placed under your car to keep your wheels from spinning.

Freedom Principle 1: The Importance of a DEFINITE DECISION

Freedom from an addiction requires a definite decision to change. It is possible to reject the consequences of negative behavior without dealing the behavior a death blow. You may have made up your mind, but have not made up your WILL.

Ezra chapters 9 and 10 give us an example of the impact of a definite decision. Some of the Israelites who returned from captivity fell into the sin of marrying pagans. The testimony of God's people was jeopardized by this breach of faith. The serious nature of such disobedience was confessed by the leaders (9:2); the people repented (9:4) and Ezra led in a prayer of confession (9:5-15). What made the difference in this case? The people made a DEFINITE DECISION. The representatives said, "Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law" (Ezra 10:3). They made this decision and implemented it. Although the obedience was painful, it freed Israel from further discipline and safeguarded their mission from God. To break free of a sin pattern, look to Christ for power, but MAKE A DEFINITE DECISION. Write it down in your journal; sign and date it.

Freedom principle 2: An ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIP

The Bible teaches this truth in various passages: "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17). "Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:9-10,12). You may wonder, "Does this principle imply that God is not enough for me to break free?" No; the "car" has enough power, but it needs "traction." Even the Lord Jesus used accountability in His discipleship strategy. He had the twelve WITH HIM. When He sent them on a preaching tour, they went in two's (Mark 3:14; 6:7).

Let's continue to study this topic in the part 3. May God give you new hope and encouragement to implement these principles through abiding in Christ. With supernatural power and good traction, no "muddy ditch" can keep you from freedom!

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Grace Notes, Jan. 25, 2007, revised from June 12, 2000. Part 2 of 4.

Notes:

[1] "Addiction" <http://www.sermonillustrations.com>

[2] The testimony of Mike Quarles, referred to in part one, is available at <http://www.GraceNotebook.com> under "Testimonies."

## **Freedom From Addiction, Part 3**

When we lived in Pennsylvania, USA, our first apartment was on a rural road. One winter's day we needed to drive to another state, but it had snowed the night before. A white 30 cm. layer of white powder blanketed the ground everywhere. Our car then was a Ford sedan that didn't have much ground clearance. We made our way to the car and started our trip. After turning out of the driveway onto the road (which had not been plowed) we only drove about one block and got stuck in the snow! How frustrating it was. It took extra traction and strategy to get unstuck and make our way to the cleared roads and finally to our destination.

We have been comparing addiction to being "stuck." The power to pull out of the "ditch" of sinful compulsive thoughts and behavior is the indwelling power of the resurrected Christ! We gained this favored status when we received Christ as our personal Savior by grace through faith. As Romans 5:10 says, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son [salvation], much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" [liberation].

Yet this power seems to have been appropriated by some believers who have continued to struggle with besetting sin--addictive behavior. We have used the concept of putting "traction" under the wheels of a stuck vehicle to illustrate the validity of biblical principles that relate to gaining freedom from bad habits.

These principles are "planks" that facilitate us with needed "traction" to get out of any "ditch" of bondage: We have noted so far:

1. The Importance of a DEFINITE DECISION
2. An ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIP

Now Freedom Principle 3: The value of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Sometimes the Enemy discourages us by attacking our perception of God's love. We think we have to get free to qualify for receiving real love. This yanks us back to a works mentality. Feelings of guilt (usually inflamed by "the accuser of the brethren" [Rev.12:11]) deflate our awareness of God's compassion for us.

Yet God does love you! Consider these quotations from the Word: "The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you'" (Jer 31:3). "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:32-33,35,37-39).

Why is this appreciation of God's love for you so strategic to living free? We are made in God's image; we are designed as relational beings. Divine love calls forth from us a response of grateful love. As Paul wrote in Romans 2:4, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

The love of God is illustrated in the joyful, eager, loving response of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). You recall how the son got fed up with wishing for pig's food. He realized then that he preferred fellowship in his father's house to wasting away in the world. This led him back home. He didn't have to settle for servanthood at home; the father lavished him with the gracious blessing of family status (cf. Eph. 1:3; 1 John 3:1,2). When we focus on the limitless ocean of God's love for us, it gives new motivation to choose His best for our lives.

#### Freedom Principle 4: A BALANCED VIEW OF YOURSELF

Although this concept is often exaggerated and misunderstood, we need to place value on ourselves as well. The familiar "second greatest commandment" reads, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). Granted, loving ourselves is not a command; it is an assumed measurement.

But consider this: if you think you are worthless, how can you adequately respond to the basic motivations of life--fear of personal loss and desire for personal gain? Take salvation, for example. The appeal to be reconciled to God assumes that the sinner cares enough about himself to desire avoidance from hell (fear of loss) and prefer the eternal benefits of heaven (desire for gain). Likewise, you have to care enough about yourself as a person to think your life's potential really matters; it REALLY IS a tragic loss if you stay stuck in a rut. It REALLY DOES matter that you gain freedom, because there are positive benefits to you, the Lord's kingdom, and others in your life. As the Scripture says, "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:7,8).[1]

If you rationalize your lack of experienced freedom with a "Who cares? My life doesn't matter" attitude, then you are being duped by the Enemy. Your Savior says, "Are not two sparrows sold

for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29-31).

We don't FEEL worthy of such love because it is undeserved. God loves us by His sovereign GRACE. Because He cared enough about us to create us and redeem us through the infinite value of the blood of His Son, we must value ourselves as well (1 Pet. 1:18.19). Your creation and redemption is God's gift to you; what you allow God to do with your life is your gift to Him. [2]

As we appropriate the freedom that is ours, WE DO OURSELVES A HUGE FAVOR! Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart"; "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 37:4; 84:11).

Forget about the TV hype, "Who wants to be a millionaire?" A better offer is, "Who wants God's best for his/her life?" That isn't a matter of chance--it is a matter of faith and freedom.

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Part 3 of 4. Grace Note for Feb. 1, 2007. Revised from June 19, 2000

[1] For a closer look at the complex issues of self worth, see GN "Sorting Your Self Out" and the Clarification article, "Self Esteem."

[2] Romans 12:1,2 says it well: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Freedom From Addiction, Part 4

In the journey to freedom from addiction, we have looked at the adequacy of knowing Christ as our LIFE. Since He is the true Vine, and we are the branches (John 15:5), we can look to Him for the strength and virtue that is necessary for all of life's demands--including freedom from a stubborn habit. We have also seen the strategic value of other biblical principles in the process of appropriating God's power for specific habitual struggles. These freedom principles include:

1. The Importance of a DEFINITE DECISION
2. An ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIP.
3. The value of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
4. A BALANCED VIEW of YOURSELF (as a person)

And now we consider:

5. The PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES of the behavior.

An alcoholic who came in for counseling was asked, "What has drinking cost you?" He replied, "It has cost me everything!" and then went on to list the financial loss, broken relationships, and inner conflicts that were left in the wake of this addiction. Sometimes the severity of the consequences is not obvious to the one in bondage, but it is definitely obvious to those around him/her. As the saying goes, "No man is an island." The quotation from Romans 14:7 fits here also: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself."

This factor was important for Jack, who severely harmed his family through an addiction to pornography. Through God's power and grace, he has been restored and they allowed his wife to put their story (and God's remedy) in print. He confesses, "My wife has been writing this book for over two years now ... She has suffered more than I'll ever understand. I pray that God will show me the suffering and pain she and the children have endured. It's essential to have a strong idea of what your family has gone through in order for the addict to take responsibility, start giving back, and start healing. My wife and children have shed many, many tears over this addiction ... Just as Nehemiah and the children of Israel needed to see the damage to Jerusalem before they could start to rebuild the wall, when I began to see how hurtful I'd been to everyone, the healing began to take place. The Lord gave me courage to go through this difficult process ... "[1]

After being sensitized to this, we should resolve to "not put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Rom 14:13). When we avail ourselves of freedom in Christ, we become available for His divine purposes in the lives of others: "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim 2:20-21). This equips us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Freedom principle 6: CLAIMING GOD'S PROMISES

Imagine God's will as a beautiful, framed picture. When you get a framed picture and want to put it on the wall, you choose the right spot and put a nail there to hang it on. Now consider God's promises as NAILS to HANG YOUR FAITH upon. "The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd" (Eccles 12:11).

The apostle Peter affirmed the importance of God's promises: "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and PRECIOUS PROMISES, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:3-4).

How about doing a Bible study and recording the promises of God that are most relevant to your situation? Here's a head start: Phil 4:13,19; 1 Cor 10:13; and John 8:32.

Freedom Principle 7: The wisdom of REPLACEMENT

If we remove a negative behavior without replacing it with a positive one, we remain unnecessarily vulnerable to trip up again. The Lord Jesus illustrated this concept when He taught about exorcising a demon: "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Matt 12:43-45). An unsaved man--even if freed of a demon--needs to be saved and filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 5:18). Even in the Christian life, reforming the flesh will never change a person's heart. When God takes His rightful place of preeminence there, He will change the believer from the inside out (2 Cor 3:17-18).

Scientists tell us that "nature abhors a vacuum"; likewise we are not only to "put off" the negative, but to "put on" the positive (Col 3:8,12).

For example, instead of unlimited eating, enjoy planned, tasty, balanced meals.

Instead of drinking alcohol, choose delicious unfermented beverages.

Instead of smoking, buy special gifts with the money saved.

Instead of watching seductive TV, read a good biography or novel.

Instead of listening to music that is addictive and sensual, listen to music that is uplifting and faith-inspiring.

Instead of immoral internet surfing, use a filtered access and explore educational CDs.

Missionary and author E. Stanley Jones prescribed an intimate relationship with God as the secret to overcoming negative coping patterns. He called this "the expulsive power of a higher affection." How can you most easily remove a dangerous item from a toddler grip? Offer the little one something that looks better! "Delight yourself also in the LORD and He shall give you the desires of your heart."

Freedom Principle 8: SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spiritual disciplines won't achieve freedom if cranked out as a form of self righteousness, but when we discover the power of abiding in Christ and claim our victory in Him, the disciplines fortify His righteousness in our character. The Psalmist testified, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You" (Ps 119:9-11).

Remember the value of God's promises? How about memorizing them? When you have God's Word in your heart, it is available for the Holy Spirit to use to protect you from the Enemy and from thoughts that trigger temptation. Notice Christ's skillful use of memorized Scripture in resisting Satan! (Matt 4:4-10). Likewise, when tested, we are to wield the "Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God" (Eph 6:17).

A major issue in the freedom process is the tearing down of strongholds (2 Cor 10:3-5). Since this is such a big topic, it would be worth studying in a separate series of articles.[2]

There is so much more that can be written about this topic, but I pray God will bless these principles to maximize your experience of freedom spiritually, psychologically, and physically. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13).

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Part 4 of 4. The series is online at <http://www.gracenotebook.com>

Notes:

[1] An Affair of the Mind, by Laurie Hall (Focus on the Family, 1996), p.241- 242.

[2] See Grace Notes: Tearing Down Strongholds, parts 1-4.

Additional resources: Erwin W. Lutzer, How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit (Chariot Victor, 1979). June Hunt, Counseling Keys: Alcohol & Drug Use; Sexual Addiction; Habits (Hope for the Heart) [www.HopefortheHeart.org](http://www.HopefortheHeart.org).

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