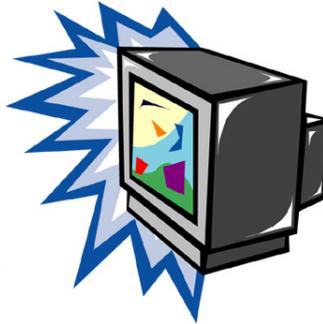
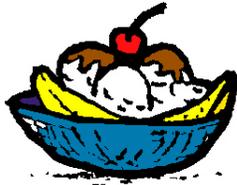


Overcoming Addictive Tendencies Once and For All



**Principles That, Once Understood and Applied,
Will Bring an End to Any Addictive Activity**

By Chris Simpson

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- * Four Simple Steps To Freedom

For additional copies:

New Wine Christian Fellowship

1035 Fairmont Parkway

Pasadena, TX 77504

(713) 910-3330

(New Wine’s web page: www.newwineonline.com)

Can You Relate To This?

See if you can relate to this passage from Romans Seven out of the Living Bible. The apostle Paul writes:

“I don’t understand myself at all. For I really want to do what is right but I can’t. And I tend to do what I don’t want to do, the things I hate. I know perfectly well that what I’m doing is wrong and my bad conscience proves that. I agree with these laws that I’m breaking. But I can’t help myself. It’s as if I’m no longer doing it. It’s sin inside of me that is stronger than me, that makes me do these evil things.” (Romans 7:15-17)

Do you in any way identify with this yet? Keep reading:

“I know I’m rotten through and through as far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can’t make myself do right. I want to, but I can’t. When I want to do good, I don’t. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I’m doing what I don’t want to, it’s plain where the trouble is, it’s sin that still has me in its evil grasp. It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God’s will as far as my new nature is concerned, but there’s something else within me in my lower nature that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still inside of me. In my mind I want to be God’s willing servant, but instead, I find myself enslaved to sin. So you see how it is, my new life tells me to do right but the old nature that is still inside of me loves to sin. Oh what a terrible predicament I am in. Who will free me from my slavery to the deadly lower nature?” (Romans 7:18-25)

Now honestly, do you see yourself here? Paul is describing a battle that we all fight; a situation with which we all struggle. This passage in Romans Seven offers a fundamental picture of ADDICTION.

Addiction Is Far More Than You Think

When you hear the word, “Addiction,” you probably think of the obvious problems of drug abuse or alcoholism. But addiction is often much more than that, and it can be a much deeper and more intense problem. Addiction can relate to many types of things: sins, habits, mind sets, depression, gloom, unbelief, fear, and fearful patterns.

I believe that most people’s struggles, including Christians, involve trying to get free from addictions. This is precisely what Paul is talking about in this chapter. He is describing his attempts to free himself from the “addictive tendencies” he sees within himself. And he identifies the bottom line problem of the addiction when he says, *“It’s sin inside of me that is stronger than me, that makes me do these evil things.”*

Here we find out what addiction really is. Fundamentally, all addiction is addiction to sin. The Greek word for sin in the New Testament means “missing the mark”. When you’re addicted to things it causes you to miss the mark and turn away from where the Lord wants you to be heading. Most addiction is born out of a sense of desperation. There are many things believers do in response to it: read lots of books, seek counsel, attend therapy sessions, engage in vigorous spiritual activities, or other things to try to find freedom from the driving compulsions in their lives.

In spite of all of these things, however, most wind up still addicted. In fact, even though they may have succeeded in overcoming addictions in one area, they find that they are still addicted, just in a new area.

Ultimately, after much struggle, striving and effort, they come to the place Paul describes in the passage where they admit, “I can’t defeat it. I give up. I’m hopelessly addicted and enslaved to this thing.” Believe it or not, to get to this point is a **GOOD THING!**

Why You Must Come to the “End of Yourself”

“What?” You might ask, “How can this be a good thing? You’re saying that coming to the point of recognizing my hopeless defeat is good?” Yes, this is a good place to be! In fact, until you get to that place, you’ll never get free. Until you finally admit, as Paul did, “What a terrible predicament I am in. Who will free me from my slavery to the deadly lower nature,” you’ll be forever stuck in Romans Seven. You have to get to the *end* of Romans Seven before you can begin living in Romans Eight, that wonderful chapter about the glories and blessings of walking in the Spirit.

Until you come to the end of yourself, to the absolute end of all your resources, you’ll never find freedom from addictions. David, in the Psalms, describes the truth of this:

“The Lord looked down from Heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that understood and sought God. They are all gone aside and become filthy. There’s none that does good, no, not one.” (Psalm 14:2-3)

This is a pretty sad commentary on the state of humanity. The prophet Isaiah offers the same truth:

“But we are all as unclean thing. And all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We fade as a leaf; our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.” (Isa 64:6)

These truths are quite hard to grasp in any personal way, until you really come to the end of yourself. Most believers know these verses, but do they genuinely believe what they say? Do *you* really believe that most of what you’ve ever done, and probably much of what you are presently doing, is totally worthless and vain? That’s a bitter pill to swallow. Yet, it’s one that must be swallowed if you ever hope to extricate yourself from the addictive tendencies in your life.

Recognizing Your True Spiritual Need

The truth is, we desperately want to believe that there is something good within us. We try to prove this to God by our well meaning attempts to “be good”, and “not sin”. But let’s get real. This is nonsense! Be perfectly honest: you don’t really love God the way you should! In fact, the only reason you love Him at all is because He first loved you. That’s the truth. He came and rescued you while you were trying to run the other way. He wooed you by His Spirit when you were first born again, and He will continue to pursue you all of your Christian life.

People are dumb, like sheep. C.S. Lewis made light of our stupidity in his writings, pointing out our incredible to ability to “look in the face of God’s endless and blinding joy and go, Naaaaah.” We’re like Esau confronted by his brother’s porridge soup. He said, “I’ll sell my inheritance forever for a little momentary porridge.” Have you ever judged Esau for that? “What an idiot!” you may have thought. “How could Esau do that?” Please don’t judge him. How quickly you could do the same thing!

The prophet Jeremiah understood this when he said:

“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. “But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” (Jer. 17:5-8)

And then, right after saying all this, Jeremiah realized in the very next verse that:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9)

At first sight, this seems like a strange thing for Jeremiah to say right after describing the tree planted by the waters. Yet, upon second thought, it makes a lot of sense. After painting such a beautiful word picture, Jeremiah suddenly realized how far away he and those he knew were from such a state. You can almost hear the anguished cry of the apostle Paul, “Who shall deliver me from my slavery...” echoed in his words.

Jesus Is the Only One That Can Free You

This chapter holds the KEY to freedom from addiction: you must first come to the end of yourself. You not only have to believe, but must also know, that nothing else will ever extricate you from your bondage. Only after you truly acknowledge

your hopeless addiction can you genuinely come to the Lord for help. When you can honestly say, “Lord, there is nothing in me that can overcome or even really wants to overcome,” then, and only then, will you be at the place of true humility to hear God’s voice.

Apparently Jeremiah came to this point, for we find God clearly speaking to him in the very next verse. Only when you truly believe what’s said in verse nine are you in the place to comprehend what God says in verse ten:

“I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jer. 17:10)

Listen to what the Lord is saying here, “Right! You’ve got it, Jeremiah! Finally, you see the truth! I search the heart! I try the reins! I am the only One that can extricate you from your addiction. I am the Savior and there is no other!”

Then, a few verses later, we see Jeremiah truly in touch with his own inadequacy. He cries out from the depths of his heart, as only one trapped in addiction can do:

“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise.” (Jer. 17:14)

These verses show us the key to being free! First, the prophet realized the desperate wickedness of his heart. Then God said, “I’m the only one that can rescue you.” After not understanding that, the prophet cried out to the Lord from the depths of his soul, “Yes, Lord, heal me! You alone can save me!” It came right from his gut...and God heard that.

The “Gut Level” Cry That Sets You Free

I had an experience similar to this in 1971 while partying at the Mardi Gras in New Orleans (This was before I met Jesus). Somebody passed around a bottle of wine spiked with LSD. The next day, while walking down a country road not far from my home, I heard the audible voice of God. He spoke seven words to me, “Chris, you’re my son, don’t do this!” I knew it was God. The devil would have said, “Right on, baby, go get some more.” No, it was God. I instantly sobered up and came out of my high. I’ll never forget it. When you hear the audible voice of God out of the sky, you’re never quite the same. I remember walking back to the house saying, “Oh my God!” over and over. When I got home, I got sick and retched for three hours. When I recovered, I never touched drugs like that again.

A few months later, in the Spring of 1971, while driving to my girlfriend’s house, I started yelling at the top of my lungs, “Come!... Come!... Come!...” over and over. I did it about ten times. Then I thought, what was that all about?

Then, six weeks later, someone did come to me and lead me to Christ. God heard that cry from the depths of my heart and He reached down and saved me from an addicted lifestyle. And all I cried was, “Come!” I didn’t even quite know to whom I was crying out. Do you remember how messed up in your head you were before you were saved? That’s how I was. Ever since hearing that audible voice from the sky, I knew I needed something more than I had. So I cried, “Come!” from the very bottom of my being and God heard me and saved me for eternity!

One day, while reading this verse in Jeremiah, the truth of all this dawned on me. I realized I could find freedom from addictions the same way I got saved, by crying out from the depths, “*Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and*

I shall be saved: for you are my praise.” This is the real meaning of the verse, “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)

Jesus’ Prescription for Addiction Relief

In the New Testament, Jesus gives us His prescription for addictions in our lives:

“Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

The word ‘labor’ in the Greek is ‘copio,’ meaning “fatigued, worn out or beating your chest in grief”. ‘Heavy laden’ in the Greek is ‘fortiso,’ and it means “loaded down with burdens”. So Jesus is saying, “Come to me, all those burdened, fatigued and worn out and I’ll give you rest.” Finally, the word for ‘rest’ in Greek is ‘anapao’ which means “a refreshing release”.

Many believers spend much of their time ‘beating their chest in grief’ over their addictions and compulsions. And instead of coming to the Lord for help, they go to methodologies, self-help groups, therapies, spiritual exercises, but Him, the living Christ. He’s the only one who can set you free. In fact, He won’t let you find lasting freedom without Him. He’s a jealous God and will have no other gods before Him. We’re told that our salvation is, “*Not of works, lest any man should boast*”. (Eph 2:9) We’re saved (and delivered daily) by grace through faith, not by works.

Open any Christian magazine today and you’ll find plenty of books to read, along with seminars and conferences that you can attend on how to get free from compulsions and addictions. However, if you had the opportunity to peer deep into the lives of those who write the books or teach the seminars you’d find that, with few exceptions, they’re still bound by compulsions and secret sins! Why is that?

Because if their message was anything but, “Jesus and Jesus alone is the answer!” then they’re offering soap and not the real thing.

Putting On Jesus’ Yoke

Jesus’ way is simple, “Come to me and I’ll give you rest or a refreshing release!” He then says, “*Take my yoke upon you...*” ‘Yoke’ in the Greek is ‘zugos’ which means “a coupling or bonding”. Now, what does He mean by this?

First, let’s consider what a yoke is and why it was used. In the days before automated farming with tractors and equipment, man used four-footed beasts to plow the ground for planting. Now, let’s say you had two oxen. One was old and experienced and the other was a wild, young ox who ran around the pasture. To use them both for plowing, you would yoke them together with a fitted side-by-side harness made of wood. The constraints of the yoke would break the wayward ways of the young ox so he would learn to walk a steady path with the old ox.

When Christ said in this verse, “Take my yoke upon you,” He was saying, “Your lifestyle is getting you into all kinds of things that distract you and prevent me from freeing you of your addictions. You need to be yoked and bonded to me.” The yoke is nothing more than the ‘spiritual disciplines’ needed to break the wild ways of sin in your life and to help you walk the steady path of the Lord.

The Absolute Necessity of Spiritual Disciplines

Without a consistent, disciplined lifestyle, you’ll never really be free from addictive tendencies. Why is that? Because compulsive activity tends to come in through the holes, the distractions, and the disorder in our lives. It’s through discipline that you seal the cracks and close the doors. However, the truth is, most peo-

ple are unwilling to walk in consistent spiritual discipline until they are *absolutely desperate*.

Over the years, many people looking for freedom have come to our church. They've come bound in drug addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, pornography, masturbation, perverted lifestyles, etc. Our ministry believes in deliverance for Christians. I know this is a controversial subject for many, but if you've been in the ministry very long, you'll have to admit that simply getting saved doesn't completely liberate a person from addictive and compulsive tendencies (I wish it would). Additional ministry and care is essential to untangle years of sin and demonic influence.

Unfortunately, most believers today are under the assumption that deliverance from a lifetime of sin and rebellion will occur overnight. Many ministries seem to support such a belief through a "touch and go" approach to pastoral care. They'll say, "Just come up to the altar and let us pray for you; and poof!, all those deep-rooted wounds and strongholds will disappear." Now, don't get me wrong. I do believe the Lord can, and will, do mighty things when one comes to Him in simple need. But deep and lasting deliverance doesn't occur through 'periodic' ministry. It takes dedicated, caring people. It takes time, effort, correction and reproof, casting out of spirits, acts of mercy and forgiveness, and much love to shepherd someone out of the hurts and patterns of abuse they've known all their lives.

True, lasting freedom from addictions doesn't come cheaply. A 'band-aid' ministry just doesn't cut it when you're dealing with a suicidal lesbian who hates herself because of years of sexual abuse from her father. She needs heart surgery. And, as I'm sure you realize, heart surgery entails far more time, energy and recuperation than the healing of a superficial wound.

This is why spiritual disciplines are so important. Spiritual discipline can be compared to the ‘recuperation time’ following major surgery. However, the analogy breaks down in that spiritual disciplines must be maintained long after the results of the operation. One vital spiritual discipline to develop is a daily, consistent ‘quiet time’ before the Lord. Another is engaging in periodic ‘praise breaks’ throughout the day to maintain a walk in the Spirit. Also, a committed, in-depth knowledge of God’s Word is essential in your battle to overcome addictive tendencies.

Finally, one of the most important disciplines of all is to maintain regular, honest and accountable relationships with others who are older and more experienced than you in the Lord. These ‘yokes’, once put on, will help steady your wild ways and bring you into places of peace and release you only dreamed about in your addiction.

Addictions: The Symptom of Something Deeper

After telling us to take His yoke, Jesus then says, “*Learn of me.*” The Greek word for learn is ‘*manthano*’, which means “to remember, retain and master”. Then He says, “*for I am meek and lowly in heart.*” What He’s asking you and I to do is to understand His true character. There’s so much confusion about the nature of God. Some see Him as a tyrant who they must serve out of fear. Others perceive Him as a distant benevolence who simply wishes a good and happy time for all (the ‘Santa Claus’ god).

But the truth is, He’s neither. He’s meek and lowly of heart. Apparently, a key to freedom is coming to a deep and profound understanding of what that means. One thing it definitely implies is that He is totally devoid of pride. In fact, we’re told

that, *“God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”* (1 Peter 5:5) If nothing else, understanding His character means doing serious war on your own prideful and self-sufficient ways.

You see, addictions are really only a symptom of a much deeper problem. Addictive tendencies are often an outward manifestation of inward rebellion, resentment, bitterness or hardness of heart. Often, the reason people get involved in addictive practices in the first place is because of the root of pride. Because of the deadness in their spirit (due to God resisting the proud) they are quite miserable within. They indulge in vices that result in addictions. It’s often just a way to relieve the pain.

Many believers, after coming to Christ, have been promised an “abundant life”. However, because they were never taught of their definite need for deliverance or were never exposed to loving, personal, pastoral ministry, they eventually become disillusioned. Instead of rivers of living water flowing out of their lives, they only see an occasional spurt. Finally, because of a frustrated and unfulfilled Christian experience, they turn to indulgences of the flesh. It can be things like: television, relationships, work, alcohol, romance, or anything that is an idol. And for a while, the indulgence does take away the gnawing pain within. But eventually, they feel even more empty, and so, continue in the addictive tread mill.

The “Really Desperate” Get a Breather!

But, praise God, Jesus shows the way out! When you become REALLY DESPERATE, then you’ll simply take Him at His Word. You’ll find yourself coming to Him in a humility and a place of need you’ve never known before. That’s when you’ll really begin to experience the REST of the Lord! It’s at this point, and usually only at this point, that believers are finally willing to say a consistent “yes” to

the Lord. Desperation has a way of opening your heart to new levels of understanding, particularly to realize the absolute necessity of spiritual discipline to maintain freedom and power in the Spirit.

Jesus then says, “*And you shall find rest unto your souls.*” The word for ‘rest’ here is different than the previous one. Here the Greek is ‘anapausos’ and it’s where we get the English word ‘pause’, which means “a respite, a breather or a reprieve”. So, the promise is that when you come to Jesus, take on the yoke of spiritual disciplines and begin to understand His character, He will give you space to breathe from your addictions and compulsions. What a glorious promise! And here it is, hidden in one of the Bible’s most familiar passages.

This rest is for the ‘soul’. Just what is the soul? First, your soul is your mind: your thinking faculties and imagination. Many spend most of their time tormented in their thoughts and imaginations. Jesus promises REST! The soul is also your emotions. So many are tossed to and fro with fear, anxiety and worry. Jesus promises REST in your very feelings. The soul is also your will. It’s often through the will that the enemy compels and drives the restless person. But, Jesus promises REST from deep seated urgings and compulsions.

When you experience a ‘pause’ in your addiction, you get hope. You can exclaim, “Wow, I *can* be free! The addiction doesn’t have to rule me!”

The Wondrous Gospel Paradox

Let’s consider the wondrous paradox of the Gospel. First, you must see that you have *no strength* to break free from your addictive tendencies. In other words, you must come to the end of yourself. At this point, the following scriptures about victory and overcoming begin to make sense in your experience: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; I’m more than a conqueror through Him that*

loves me; and greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.” Then, God begins granting revelation of who He really is (His meek and lowly character) and who you are in Him. Such revelation is essential in order to find the fight in your spirit needed to overcome your addictions.

Now you might be thinking, “Wait a minute. It can’t be that easy. Surely there’s a lot more involved in overcoming enslaving habits and drives.” Well, let’s consider what Jesus goes on to say: “*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*” It’s the enemy of your soul that’s telling you it’s hard to get free. He’s always saying things like, “You’re stuck in your bondage. It’s too hard. It’s too complicated. Forget it! You’ll never find your way out.” Does all that sound familiar? If it does, stop listening. We’re clearly told to, “*Give no place to the devil.*” (Eph 4:27)

You see, Jesus’ yoke and burden (of spiritual disciplines) is really easy and light. It’s true. In fact, after a while, you’ll enjoy the disciplines of the Spirit so much that they’ll become your joy and rejoicing. One thing’s for sure, they are definitely lighter than the burden of addiction with all the guilt and hopelessness that goes with it.

Four Simple Steps to Freedom

In conclusion, let’s review what’s needed to find lasting freedom from addiction:

1) *First, confess that you’re stuck in your Addiction.* Quit trying to overcome. Give up! Now, come to Jesus like that. Cry out to Him from the very bottom of your heart, “Jesus, heal me and I’ll be healed. Save me and I’ll be saved. For You alone are my salvation and my hope!” Once you really lay down your striving and struggling to “be good”, you’ll finally be in a place for the Lord to speak to your heart.

2) *Commit to a disciplined lifestyle.* How desperate are you to be free? Only desperate people are really willing to do this. And, only desperate people really ever get free. When you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, then you'll do anything, like actually coming to Him regularly throughout the day and worshipping Him with 'Praise Breaks'.

Pray this, "Lord, convict me and help me. Bring me to the place where I'm willing to do anything you ask, even to the point of denying my flesh and taking up my cross. Put Your yoke on me NOW and stay on me when I try to take it off!"

3) *Own, acknowledge and confess your pride.* Honestly, do you think you have been doing pretty good in the pride area? Are you willing to admit that you probably have far more pride than you realize? Pray this, "Jesus, I confess pride, self-sufficiency and independence. Forgive me, break me and bring me down, Lord. I'm willing for you to use whatever means at your disposal. Expose and deliver me from the subtle deceptions of pride, even if it means putting certain persons or situations in my life that I would not choose on my own. Do it, Jesus, for you are my Lord and Master!"

4) *Ask Jesus to give you his rest.* Turn your eyes on Jesus right now and cry out to Him with all your heart, asking Him for His rest. If you are solely, utterly, simply, and totally focused on Him, then He will come. To the degree that you are honest, humble and open, to that degree will He release you and set you free. "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" (James 4:8)

I trust that as you choose to pray these things, He will loose hope and courage in your spirit. From this moment on, you need never again believe the lie that you can't overcome your addictions. For "*Greater is He that is in you,*" and "*He gives you power to tread upon the serpents and scorpions.*" You've been listening to the

serpent too long. Start treading on him today, in the name of Jesus! And, receive the REST of the Lord!

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