

#224 "Addicted"

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At our cores, even as new creations in Christ, there is an ongoing war within, a battle between the Spirit and the flesh. As Galatians 5:17 says, they are at enmity with one another. In fact, our lives could be described as a summation of consecutive struggles between the flesh and the Spirit. Faithfulness brings us great joy and peace along with eternal rewards, for such is the fruit of obedience. Failure, on the other hand, brings pain, sorrow, frustration, anger, and consequences, for such is the nature of sin. The devil has come to steal, kill, and destroy, while Jesus by His indwelling Spirit has come to give us life and life to the full (John 10:10). The abundant life should be the goal of every believer. It is a life driven by faith, love, and hope and a life increasingly unhindered by the lust and lure of sin. This process of Jesus gradually removing sinful hindrances from our hearts and minds is our sanctification. He will not stop working this side of eternity to make us more like Him. The question for us is whether we will willingly cooperate, and, in fact, beg Him to move His work forward, or whether we will resist the Spirit's cleansing within us. There are evil thought patterns, destructive habits, and corrupt desires that marked the old self, but now we are new creations in Christ, the old having passed away and all things having become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). God has given us new hearts that are no longer desperately wicked but rather indwelt by Christ, though they need ongoing sanctification (Ezekiel 36:26, Matthew 5:8, Ephesians 3:17). We have been given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) rather than the mind of death and evil, though our thinking needs to be continually refined and purified (Romans 12:1-2). Our wills, marked by the choices we make and our tendencies or behavior, need to be brought increasingly under the control of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). We are and always will be this side of eternity works in progress, but progress is a good thing, a godly thing (Philippians 2:12-13). Progress brings us great joy because it means God loves us, He has kept His promise to us, and He is filling us even more with love for Him and for others (2 Corinthians 5:14). It proves that we are indeed His (John 13:34-35).

Winning the war within between the Spirit and the flesh depends upon how we do in our daily battles. For some, enough losses have led to bad habits or even an addiction. Addictions are driven by the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life just as any sin is. They are sin habits that are repeated over and over again such that breaking free becomes increasingly difficult. We can be addicted mentally to thinking certain ways, perhaps hating ourselves or fostering a spirit of indifference, anger, or rejection. We can be addicted physically to things such as drugs, food, or even good things such as too much exercise, for example. The addicted state is a state of willful submission to sin and self that is marked by a loss of ability to properly love and care for others and worship God as we ought. As believers, we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6), even though we still have the flesh to battle. However, when we become addicted to something, the lusts of the flesh begin to envelop us to the extent that we feel helpless and hopeless to win and walk in righteousness. The cycle must break, and indeed it can be broken.

To truly overcome an addiction, we must do more than find a lesser sin that we use to cope. We must do more than just not do the sin; we must take that area of our lives and do good with it. If we were addicted to gambling, we need to honor God with our finances. If we were struggling with lust, we need to learn to love our spouses better. We need to abstain from the sin and indulge in what is good. Overcoming is only shown to be for real when it endures and when real change has taken place.

Now, an addiction is more than just a behavior. There is a thought behind the choice that is driving the sin. The addiction is the hook, but the bait came before in the form of some deceit and trickery of the devil. Perhaps a person has come to believe that no one will ever love them, and so they debase themselves with those who use them. Perhaps a person has believed a lie that they need wealth in order to please God or to impress people, and so they have become addicted to get-rich-quick schemes or other shady business practices. In order to get over an addiction by God's grace, we need to ultimately uncover the bait that we have sunk our teeth into. Until we forsake that, we will never get off the addictive hook.

Some may be reading this feeling hopeless in their battles with bad habits. Then it is time to pray that the Lord would change the heart and the mind to want what God says is good and to think on what God says is good. If we have trouble believing that God's ways are truly more desirable, we need to pray that God would change what we want. That is a prayer if prayed in faith that God will answer because sanctification is His revealed will (1 Thessalonians 4:3). He will change our desires, He will empower us to make better decisions, He will begin to make us despise the sin, and He will make us begin to find more joy in what is good. His grace is sufficient, and He will deliver us. When we decide to go to war with the devil and resist him, he will flee (James 4:7). That is a promise of God to us. It is not enough just to avoid an addictive behavior for a time, but ultimately God needs to deliver us from the unbiblical thinking that makes us vulnerable to a particular sin. When that thinking is brought into humble obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), we will put ourselves in a humble position of trust toward God and with others. This position of need and faithful dependence upon God is open season for the devil to come at us again. Such is the nature of addictions. But we will know we are delivered when we would rather endure the need and look to God for provision than take the easy way out. This will show us that we truly have an appetite for life and for love and that we have finally seen the devil's tricks for what they were- thievery, destruction, and reeking of death. The peace that comes with this sanctified state of mind is more than worth the battle to get free in the first place.

Some addictions are more obvious than others, but we must realize that sin by its very nature is addictive because it seeks to control us and make us slaves of the devil. Even having bad friends, being judgmental, seeking the approval of others rather than God, or being a chronic complainer can be addictions. But sin patterns can be broken by faith through Christ as we yield to the Spirit and make no provision for the flesh by avoiding vulnerable situations and corrupting influences. Even the most serious of Christians can and do fall if put in vulnerable situations for too long. We need to be wise and listen to the Spirit so that we don't succumb.

The abundant life isn't just for some believers but for all. This is why unbelievers need Christ to set them free lest they move from one sin to the other. God can change our very wiring and thinking so

that we can want what He wants and enjoy obedience. Therein alone is freedom and life to the full. After all, the only addiction that satisfies is an unquenchable love for the Savior.