

628 What Can I Do about My Addiction?

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Many people today are slaves and don't know it. In fact, if you asked them, they would deny they are enslaved to anything. What has enslaved them? Someone has well said that our sinful habits begin as fragile as a spider's web but end up being as hard to break as a steel cable. If you ask most people what they think about addictions, they would point to the alcoholic or drug addict. Addiction is usually someone else's problem, but most people at one time or another are addicted to something—whether they know it or not. My good friend, Ron Wilkins, tells me that people are actually addicted to more than one hundred different things. An addiction is an unhealthy dependency on any substance or behavior that has negative or destructive consequences or causes significant distress for the person. We all face problems. The question is what are we going to do about them.

We are all creatures of habit. Some habits are good and productive; they provide structure and discipline to our lives. Other habits, however, end up enslaving and destroying our lives. They can destroy our self-worth, our relationships with our families, and our relationship with God. God has always wanted first place in our lives; we must not allow anything else to rule our lives. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. In this he was quoting what some libertines were crying out for. Sometimes when you get what you want, you find that it wasn't what you expected. I recall the fly buzzing around some flypaper. He smelled the gooey stuff on the paper and said, "My flypaper." The flypaper chuckled to himself and said, "My fly." That's the way bad habits are that become addictions; they bite and destroy.

Jesus showed such great self-control. We can learn from his example. In Matthew 27:12-14, the Bible says, "And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, 'Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?' And He did not answer him with regard to even a *single* charge, so the governor was quite amazed." Jesus showed great restraint by not by not attacking others who were attacking him. Peter notes that example in 1 Pet. 2:18-23, when he tells servants, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." Jesus could easily have called twelve legions of angels (72,000) if he had so desired; but he restrained himself.

Next we need to explore what is causing addiction. Most people don't set out to be addicts or to allow other things to control them. If one knew all the consequences to choices, he might not be so quick to choose. Solomon said in Prov. 25:28, "*Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit." When people get entangled in sin and overcome, the sin becomes master. There are various types of addiction: overwork, gambling, overspending, smoking, drinking, drugs, sexual, compulsive exercises, bad habits of speech, anger, television, internet, or a hobby. Addiction can be defined in many ways, one being as an unhealthy dependency on any substance or behavior that has negative or destructive consequences or causes significant distress for the person. If one is having trouble in relationships, work, emotional stability, or other consequences (i.e., run-ins with the law, health problems), these are red flags that are signaling a problem with addiction.

Addiction is not something that just happens. There are reasons behind addictive behavior. People usually become addiction to behaviors that they find pleasurable. Certain pathways in the brain are stimulated by the pleasure, which produce chemicals that are rewarding to the person, and thereby the behavior is reinforced. The addictive behavior, at least early on, is also often done socially, and serves as a common bond between people and increases feelings of acceptance in the group. Another powerful motive for engaging in addictive behavior is that it serves as an escape from painful feelings and situations. Then there is force of habit, which is a tendency to repeat behaviors that are known and familiar, as a source of comfort. The addiction becomes like an old friend, but this old friend hurts you physically or emotionally and robs you of the joy that comes from life. In John 8:34 Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Sin is entrapping, and a person can get entangled in it and overcome very easily. People often deceive themselves thinking they can get loose from sin anytime, but breaking loose from sin takes God's help. We can't do it on our own.

How do people get addicted? Well, they get caught up in a vicious cycle: Life's stresses become difficult or unbearable, so one begins to mull over the painful event. He becomes depressed and down. At this low point a person finds a behavior pleasurable. He then uses that pleasurable experience to escape the reality of the pain he feels. This escape is, of course, a fantasy; but he makes a decision to escape, plans his escape, and acts out his plan. Once he acts it out, he feels ashamed of his behavior. He feels guilty for having done it and fearful of getting caught. At this he resolves to stop and attempts to act normal. But a pain event or stress leads him back into the cycle of needing relief, so he goes right back into the sinful behavior he hates. Sinful addictions are self-nurturing or self-perpetuating. Each episode leads to another and makes the next one easier. Sin and addiction often causes individuals to play games of denial and to put the responsibility for their sins on others. They cast their blame on their parents, their spouses, their siblings, their friends, or even upon God. James said in James 1:13-15, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Addictive behavior is numbing. Addictions in time can no longer provide the needed escape from pain, so addicts add other behaviors to enhance the experience. A Chinese proverb concerning alcoholism says, "one drink is too many, and ten thousand drinks are not enough." People become callous to the point that they don't care who they hurt as long as they can get their "fix" in the addiction. Sin destroys love for God, for family, for the church, and for self. Sin always makes a person feel small in his own eyes. Paul spoke about this callousness in Ephesians 4:19. He said, "they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." When you can no longer feel, you have no problem doing things that destroy. All addictions have a strong component of self-destruction: guilt, embarrassment, violation of personal values, broken promises, broken friendships, broken families, imprisonment, and wasted life. In the end sin kills. The devil has lied to us in telling us "sin isn't so bad"; but sin still destroys us spiritually. Paul said in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23 is still true. Paul

said in Galatians 6:7-8, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

So we ask, “**HOW CAN I OVERCOME BAD HABITS?**” **First, flee the place of temptation.** You can’t walk through the mud and not get muddy. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33: do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” When Paul says, “do not be deceived,” it is usually because people are lying to themselves. In this case they believe they can remain around the sin yet not be affected by it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Solomon said, in Proverbs 6:27-28, “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?” The answer, of course, is no. You can’t play with sin and not get caught up in it. Paul told the young man Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” We too must learn to flee the things that hurt. John said in 1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” If you know you have a problem with drinking alcohol, don’t go where people drink. If you have a problem with sexuality, don’t go to sexually provocative movies or rent them.

Second, learn to say “No!” Count the cost before you act and say no to what you know is wrong. Joseph did that and God blessed him for it. The Bible says in Genesis 39:7-10: Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. All sin is against God. There is no victimless sin, because God always suffers when we do what is wrong. Learn to say no.

Third, draw near to God. When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid in the bushes. That’s really the wrong thing to do. God always knows. Though He knows, He loves us. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 4:14-16, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Draw close to God. James said in James 4:7-8, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” People in prayer and in God’s presence will not do what they will do when they are alone. When you are alone, remember that you are not out of the presence of God. The best defense against sin is to be close to God.

Fourth, hunger for righteousness. Jesus said in Matt. 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” You’ve got to want righteousness like food and water. Want it so bad that you’ve got to have it. Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:7-10, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train (discipline) yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Overcoming sin takes hard work and desire. **Fifth, focus your mind on God’s will.** Paul said in Rom. 12:1-2, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” It takes focus to be what God desires. Fix your mind on what is right and block out the temptation. Paul said in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” When you hunger for righteousness and set your mind on serving God, you won’t have time to be drawn back into the world. There is no sin, no enslavement, no addiction from which the cross cannot free us. The answer to so many struggles is to take a long and close look at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Peter said in 2 Peter 1:5-11, “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.” The Christian life is one of growth, of taking one step at a time to get closer and closer to the Lord. If we do these things, the Bible promises we will never stumble but will enjoy and abundant entrance into heaven.

The first step in our journey with God is to become a Christian. To do this one must first believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now I mean that he really believes and decides that Jesus will be the Lord of his life, to believe what He says and to be willing to keep His commandments. Because Jesus is His Lord, he will repent of sin, every one of them. He’ll give them up, because Jesus is more important. He’ll confess the name of Jesus before others and be baptized (immersed) in water in the name of the Lord and for the forgiveness of his sins. Will you come to the Lord and obey His gospel?

Copyright 2006, Phil Sanders
Concord Road Church of Christ
8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027
1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org

www.tv.God-answers.org