

Learn how to walk free from the
bondage of compulsive behaviour

part of the



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Overcoming **Addiction**



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CHRISTIAN
BROADCASTERS



Index of abbreviations

All scripture references are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

AMP Amplified Bible • NIV New International Version • NAS New American Standard

NKJ New King James Version • NCV New Century Version • TM The Message • TLB The Living Bible

NRS New Revised Standard Version • PHPS Phillips N.T. in Modern English

• GWT God's Word Translation • TEV Today's English Version • NEB New English Bible

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Welcome

to Overcoming Addiction

'Addictive behaviour is just the fruit of a deeper issue – we need to discover the root'

You don't have to look too hard to find evidence of the power of addiction in modern life. In daily conversation we often use the language of addiction without thinking – 'I'm a choc-oholic', 'I'm a Facebook addict' or 'I haven't had my coffee fix this morning'. Others talk of needing 'retail therapy' or a 'detox'.

More seriously, we hear the destructive effects of addiction in the news every day. In the UK...

- **The total cost of alcohol harm is estimated to be as high as £25.1 billion a year**
- **Almost half of all regular cigarette smokers are eventually killed by their addiction**
- **As many as half of people sent to prison are estimated to be problem drug users**

The costs of these kinds of addiction are enormous – in wasted money and wasted lives. Even these statistics paint an incomplete picture as it is impossible to know the full toll these addictions take on marriages, families and individuals' mental health.

But substance addiction forms just the tip of the iceberg in our addicted culture. There are other serious forms of addiction too: sex addiction, including pornography abuse; eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia; and behavioural patterns such as shopping, gambling and even approval addiction. These also ruin lives and jeopardise futures.

Of course, we need to look at an addiction as more than a problem to be fixed. We need to look with God's eyes at the person. Addictive behaviour is just the fruit of a much deeper issue – we need to discover the root underneath it. There are major questions of identity which must be addressed.

The good news is that, in God's strength, any addiction can be overcome. Through His Word, by His Spirit and together with His people, freedom from addiction is available for you, starting today.

(Sources: ASH, Alcohol Concern, National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse – all 2012 figures; UK Drug Policy Commissions 2008)

The Overcoming Series is designed to help people like you find God's help in dealing with the challenges that face us all.

Contained in these little booklets are big truths from God's Word, guidance on how to pray, and practical suggestions for change. Turn over to begin reading a selection of articles and testimonies written by people who understand what you're going through and long to help you overcome.

Then, starting on page 16, there are 28 readings from Bob Gass, author of *The Word For Today*, to help you practice new thought patterns and habits day by day for a month. As the Bible says, 'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4). With the help of our great God, you can overcome any challenge you face.



Discover the other titles in the Overcoming Series on page 35

Addiction -

Where do I start?

'True healing from addiction therefore has physical, spiritual and relational implications'

What is addiction? It can be explained in two ways – neurologically and theologically.

Scientists tell us that addictions take root because of a flood of natural chemicals that are released into our brain when we experience the euphoric moment known as a 'high'. It's why many people get addicted to things other than substances – shopping, pornography or gambling, for instance – because the brain supplies its own 'drug' and we get addicted to the rush.

Those chemicals help take away pain. They can help us block out bad situations or unresolved hurt. But they don't last long, and they leave us wanting more.

There is another explanation for addiction, and that is misdirected worship of God. Rather than finding satisfaction in the One who knows us and knows how to give us exactly what we need, we look for it in a 'quick fix' solution. Instead of going to the Healer with our pain, loneliness or anxiety, we block it out with pills or thrills of our own choice. It becomes, in Tim Keller's words, a 'counterfeit god' to which we turn to feel better, and by which we ultimately become enslaved.

The effects of addiction can reach beyond the addict himself. Once a serious addiction takes hold, friends, loved ones, work colleagues and others begin to feel the consequences too.

Bill Radwell writes, 'Addiction is a soul-destroying slow death in which the sufferer loses touch with the reality of who they are, who God is, and the world around them. It's characterised by deception, shame and an escalating loss of control. At its worst, addicts may become reclusive and stop looking after themselves as they sink into the oblivion of being totally abandoned to their drug of choice.'

True healing from addiction therefore has physical, spiritual and relational implications – we need to be aware of our bodies, our souls and those around us as we step into freedom.

As Neil T Anderson puts it, 'Freedom is the birthright of every child of God. It comes with the package.'

Step by step

Your guide to overcoming addiction with God's help

'Taking hold of your new identity is the key to true freedom'

Overcoming an addiction rarely happens overnight, especially in cases where addiction is longstanding or involves substance abuse. Some suggestions of where to find professional help can be found on page 15. But these three keys from God's Word will help you begin your journey into freedom.

1. EMBRACE YOUR NEW IDENTITY

'Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!' 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

The day you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you became a new person. Not new on the outside (sadly, for some of us!) but completely new on the inside. You were remade in the likeness of Jesus and 'given everything [you] need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness' (2 Peter 1:3 NIV).

Taking hold of this new identity – and all the resources that come along with it – is the key to true freedom.

Too often we skip over verses like these, or don't take them seriously. We think we need more than what God has already provided in Christ to overcome addiction – like a 12 step programme, or an accountability group. While these things can help us

in working out our freedom, they will not in themselves set us free.

Steve McVey and Mike Quarles who have decades of experience in helping people overcome addiction, write: 'No one ever got saved, freed, or sanctified by doing anything. No one ever will ... Only God can change us, and our part is to exercise faith – that is, to believe the truth of what He has done and what He says.

They got on to say, 'We are saved by faith in Him alone and the Christian life is lived by faith in Him alone. We are also freed from addiction and sanctified by faith in Him alone.'

(Source: *Helping Others Overcome Addictions*, Steve McVey and Mike Quarles, Harvest House)

Memorise 2 Corinthians 5:17 in your favourite Bible translation. To help you learn it, write it out beautifully and put it in a prominent place that you see often (e.g. In the corner of the bathroom mirror or on the front of your fridge).

TRY...



2. EXERCISE SOME NEW HABITS

'So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise' Ephesians 5:15 NLT

While actions and habits have no power in themselves to bring us freedom from addiction (see, for instance, Colossians 2:23), it's important to start building in new habits which will help you to remember what God has done for you and to sustain your freedom.

Daily time in God's Word to remember who He is and what He has done for you is absolutely essential. Regular time in prayer and worship keeps our heart tender and our affections warm towards Him. Confessing sinful thoughts as soon as they occur to you will help you to resist temptation next time.

Write out a list of your 'red flags' (see pages 12–13) and make a plan for how you are going to avoid them from now on. For instance, if your problem is porn addiction, 'I will stop watching TV or using the internet late at night' or, if you always overeat when you are alone, 'I will only eat meals with friends and family.'

There may also be some specific behaviours which you need to address, too, relating to the exact nature of your addiction. For instance, staying away from particular places at particular times. At the very least being aware of them is common sense – and it may be the thing that protects us from slipping back into patterns of addiction during a weak moment.



TRY...

3. EXPERIENCE NEW COMMUNITY

'Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently... Carry each other's burdens' Galatians 6:1-2 NIV

God created us for community and to be part of a body bigger than ourselves and our immediate family. We need to be constantly reminded of who we are in Christ (see above, 'EMBRACE YOUR NEW IDENTITY') and encouraged in our lifestyles (see 'EXERCISE SOME NEW HABITS'). That's why He gave us the church.

Our churches should be places where grace is extended to those who are struggling with addiction, and the families of addicts can be supported while they find healing. Sadly this is not always the case, and addicts can be met with judgement instead of mercy, rejection instead of acceptance.

You may need to find a supportive Christian community outside of your local church. Another local church may have a specific recovery group or ministry, or you may have to travel in order to find one.

Once again, freedom is not found in a supportive community – it is only the truth about Jesus' finished work on the cross which sets us free (John 8:32). But supportive, caring community is essential to anyone seeking freedom from addiction.

TRY...



Freedom from addiction usually starts with the risky step of becoming vulnerable enough to tell others about your struggle. Find a group of people who can help and get started. Some suggestions of where to look for help are offered on page 15.

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'ONCE AN ADDICT'

by Barry Woodward

*'I REALISED THAT WITH GOD,
NOTHING IS WASTED AND THAT
HE COULD EVEN USE SOMEONE
WITH A PAST LIKE MINE.'*

I WAS BORN in Salford, Manchester. I really struggled at school and left with no qualifications. It was then I met a group of guys who were taking drugs. They were smoking cannabis, taking amphetamines and using LSD. That's when I started to use drugs. Before long, we were all using heroin. Eventually, I started to deal cannabis, LSD and speed. I then met a girl who was 11 years older than me called Lisa. She was an addict too. We moved into a flat together in Moss Side. That's when I started to deal heroin.

It wasn't long before I was on the treadmill of crime, prison, crime, prison, crime, prison. After one sentence, I went on a nine-month bender when I wouldn't let myself sleep. I'd just sit there making house music with my electronic music equipment, taking whizz and other drugs. Right out of the blue, I started to hear voices. I was later admitted to Cheadle Royal psychiatric unit in Manchester.

Nine years later, I was still hearing voices. I was now an outpatient. By now I'd split up with Lisa and I was living in Rochdale. Then one Thursday, I got chatting to this guy on a bus. On the Sunday, I was taking my dog for a walk and I met him again outside the local hospital. He told me he'd been to a church that met in the hospital ground.

The next day, I was walking past the hospital and I was looking for a church, but I couldn't see it. On the Wednesday, I had an appointment with my new psychiatrist. This was my first appointment since moving to Rochdale. That afternoon, I was taking my dog for a walk past the hospital again, and I still couldn't see a church. On the Friday, one of my neighbours knocked on my door. Her name is Dot. I asked her if she knew

where the church was. She said, 'Yes, course I do; I go to that church! I'll take you on Sunday morning!'

On the Sunday, we walked into the church. I sat down next to Dot. There was a tap on my shoulder, I looked round; it was the guy that I'd met on the bus! And then five minutes later, I heard the words behind me, 'Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!' I looked round, and it was my psychiatrist! Remember, I was suffering from psychosis. I thought, 'Have these guys been following me?'

The speaker asked if people wanted prayer. I thought, 'What have I got to lose?' I asked him to pray for my heroin addiction and the voices. As he prayed for me, I started to shake, tears started to run down my cheeks and it felt like there was fire being poured in my body! I realised that this must be God. Straight away the voices disappeared and within four weeks, I was off all the drugs! The next day, I prayed a prayer and invited God into my life.

Within no time I realised that with God, nothing is wasted and that He could even use someone with a past like mine. I felt that God had a specific purpose for my life and that He wanted me to be a public speaker, that He was going to turn my mess into a message that would help other people. After studying at Cliff College I set up a charity called Proclaim Trust, which facilitates the work that I do.

That episode in church that day changed my life. Now fifteen years later, I'm still changed, so I was changed and I've stayed changed! It just shows that with God's help, anything is possible.

Barry's inspiring book 'Once an Addict' is available from UCB2GO priced £7.99. For more about Barry's speaking ministry, visit www.proclaimtrust.org.

The Addictive Process

by Bill Radmall

THE ADDICTIVE PROCESS, or cycle, is a recurring pattern that addicts keep going round and round in. Part of the treatment for addiction is to identify what the person's cycle is: How does it start? What do they do? What happens afterwards?

RED FLAGS

The first part of the addictive cycle is commonly described as 'Red flags'. Red flags are moments where something triggers the addict – it will be different for different people. For example, if the thing that particularly causes someone to be stressed and then to go for their addiction is being alone, then that would be their red flag. When the red flag starts, it triggers off a sort of preoccupation; they start thinking about doing the thing that they want to do. For someone who is a shopaholic, it might be that they start thinking about going out and buying something. It's usually triggered by pain or the prospect of feeling pain, so a typical example would be this: A shopaholic has got a job interview, and they are feeling stressed about it; they don't want to make a fool of themselves. Their particular 'thing' might be that they are frightened that people won't like them. If they have low self-esteem, they might fear that people will reject them, so for them that could be a red flag. This is a dangerous situation for them to be in. They will start thinking about

going out shopping just before they go to the interview; that will make them feel a bit better and just take the edge off their anxiety. So they go to the shopping mall and into the stores and, before they know it, time has gone by because they have got so absorbed in the thing they were looking to buy. The interview is long gone, but in a way they feel better because they are not feeling stressed anymore; they feel happier than they did. So it worked! And that is the whole thing with addictions – people wouldn't do it if they didn't find that it worked.

Addictions are extremely effective in terms of helping to blank out bad feelings, and to bring up some good feelings even if the addict feels bad afterwards.

So that's how red flags work. They are the starting point of the whole cycle and for different people they will have different red flags, different things that trigger them, that stress them particularly, depending on their background and the areas that they are vulnerable in.

REFLEX

The second part of the cycle is the 'Reflex'. This is when the person begins to plot what they are going to do next and starts making a few choices. So going back to the shopaholic example, the person might start

getting into their car, they might decide to go down the road towards the shopping mall; they will actually start making some choices about what they are going to do. They are not quite there yet but they are on their way; they have started the journey.

RITUAL

The third aspect is the 'Ritual'. This encompasses the whole journey between the first impulse and the final destination and because it's a ritual, it's something that is repeated and repeated and repeated.

If we think of somebody who is a pornography addict, they will often go to the same newsagents to get the pornography, parking in the same place, maybe at the same time of day – it will all be very ritualised; the whole thing is like a repeated cycle. While they are doing this, the person is often in a kind of foggy euphoria, feeling quite good in a way because, by this stage, they are going down because they are so preoccupied with what they are going towards. One person has described it as 'one's whole being pulsing with carnal anticipation', which is quite a good description, I think. It's almost impossible to slow down or stop – all that matters is the object of the desire. So this is like an arrow that has been fired at a target – it has already left the bow and is halfway towards it.

RELEASE AND CONSEQUENCE

The final part of the sequence is 'Release and consequence'. At some point there will be a kind of ecstatic release – whether it's winning money when gambling online or whatever it is – there will be a moment of adrenalin rush and feeling good, but it's often followed by numbness, guilt, shame and an aching emptiness. The problem with that is that those are the very feelings that can trigger off another cycle, so typically a person will feel dreadful after they have done whatever they have done. They probably didn't really want to do it; it certainly isn't something they are proud of, and they start beating themselves up about it, feeling bad, feeling 'Oh, I always do this kind of thing because I am just a rubbish person'. They start playing out the old tapes at the back of their mind about how rubbish they really are and, before they know it, they feel so bad they need to act out their addictive cycle again. So you can see how this is quite a nasty spiral that can keep repeating back on itself.

Taken from Bill Radmall, 'Insight into Addiction', copyright CWR 2009. Used with permission.



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More help with Addiction

Advice and Guidance

There is a wealth of support available to those experiencing problems of addiction, or for people who love them.

Useful Contacts

NHS guidance on dealing with addiction

Visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/Addictions

Betel of Britain

Christian rehab centre for men and women seeking to become drug and alcohol-free
www.betel.org.uk

Celebrate Recovery

www.celebraterecovery.co.uk
Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centred, Bible-based recovery programme designed to help people address a variety of hurts, habits, and hang-ups

Alcoholics Anonymous

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk (for those affected by alcohol addiction)
www.al-anonuk.org.uk (for their families and loved ones)

Living Waters

www.living-waters-uk.org
Christian ministry for men and women to address sexual addiction issues in a safe and confidential environment

Naked Truth

www.nakedtruthprayer.com
Christian ministry aiming to open eyes and free lives from the destructive effects of online pornography through awareness and support groups

Further Reading

Insight into Addiction by Bill Radwell (CWR)
Helping Others Overcome Addictions by Steve McVey and Mike Quarles (Harvest House)

Your 28 Days of Change

God's spirit is in you and...

'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world'

It takes time to change long-standing thought patterns, habits and behaviour. We need to keep coming before God in our brokenness and asking for His help.

The rest of this Overcoming booklet is designed to help bring you before God for the next 28 days – to learn from His wisdom in His Word and to access His healing power through prayer.

Make a decision to set aside the time each day to read and respond in prayer. Don't worry if you miss a day or two, just pick up wherever you left off.

Keep a notebook and pen nearby to jot down anything that occurs to you while you read, or quotes that inspire you to think differently. Trust that God will speak to you personally about your healing over the coming weeks.

Remember, Jesus is on your side, willing you to succeed. Right now, He is praying to the Father on your behalf.

God's Spirit is in you, and 'He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).



The daily readings are written by Bob and Debby Gass, authors of *The UCB Word For Today*, and originally appeared there first. Over a million people around the world read Bob and Debby's warm, encouraging words each day.

You can receive a quarterly copy of *The UCB Word For Today* free of charge – see the back page for more details.

DAY 1 Cut the cord 'On the day you were born your cord was not cut...' Ezekiel 16:4 NIV

ARE YOU STILL tied to the things of your past? Are you still being fed emotionally by relationships that need to be severed? You'll only cut the cord when you realise that you can get what you need from a better source. Paul speaks of '...His power that is at work within us' (Ephesians 3:20 NIV). What is that power? It's the God-given ability to cut the cord that ties you to the old mud-holes of yesterday. If a pig and a sheep fall into the same mud, one will wallow and the other will try to get out. That's because their natures are different. Whether you fell into the mud or were dragged back into it is not the issue. Your new nature won't let you stay there. It'll cry, 'I don't belong here! I want to get out! Help me Lord!'

'But I've really blown it this time!' you say. Listen to these words from a man whose failures make yours look like charitable deeds: 'When I kept it all inside ... the pressure never let up ... then I let it all out; I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to God." Suddenly the pressure was gone - my guilt dissolved, my sin disappeared' (Psalm 32:3-5 TM). Pronounce 'the last rites' over your failures, forgive those who've hurt you, cut the cord that connects you to the past, and start moving forward.

Prayer Point

Father, I come to You today with an open heart. I admit that I am not perfect and have many failings; I don't want to live a lie anymore, where I portray myself as one thing but live a life inside of me that's quite different. Lord, I want to live an honest life before You; help me come to a place of peace where secrecy and stress are things of the past, in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2 You're a work in progress! '... Until we all ... become mature' Ephesians 4:13 NIV

BIRTH AND GROWTH are different processes, both naturally and spiritually. There's a big difference between being saved and being whole. One happens instantly, the other is the work of a lifetime. When God saves you, your spirit is immediately changed but your emotions, your appetites and your attitudes still need working on. In each of us there are things that need to be healed, and until they are, we struggle with them.

What are those areas in your life? Are you dealing with them? Those who tell you, 'If you were really a Christian you wouldn't act like that,' forget that falling down is just a part of learning to walk. You can know what to do, yet struggle to do it. Sin is

not necessarily the problem; sometimes it's how we medicate the problem. For example, we go out looking for intimacy and end up with sex, or go out looking for peace and come home with a bottle of alcohol. And all the while, our real needs are never addressed. The answer cannot be found in people or things, it can only be found in a relationship with God! Real peace comes when you turn to Him in your weakness and allow Him to do for you what nobody else can. Only He can regenerate your spirit. Only He can satisfy your emotions. Only He can bring you to the place of maturity and wholeness. Why don't you come to Him today?

DAY 3 Don't be undermined

'Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character"
1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV

GOD TOLD HIS PEOPLE, 'If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble' (Numbers 33:55 NIV). Was God being uncharitable? No, He just understood that if His people hung out with the Canaanites, they'd pick up their habits, seek their approval, live by their values and end up worshipping their gods! That's why He laid down His law so clearly!

John Maxwell says, 'You'll acquire the vices and virtues of your closest associates. The fragrance of their lives will pervade yours.' He's right! You can tell yourself that a bad relationship won't hurt you; or that your good will rub off on them.

But who are you kidding? If you put on a pair of white gloves, go into your back yard and pick up dirt, the dirt won't get clean, but the gloves will definitely get dirty. Right? Wake up! A toxic relationship is like a malignant cancer cell – if left unchecked, it'll rob you of your health, and maybe even your life. Miguel de Cervantes, who wrote Don Quixote, said, 'Tell me your company, and I'll tell you who you are.' Take another look at the influences in your life today, for they're doing two things: a) moulding you, and b) motivating you. If a constant drip can wear away a stone, then the wrong influences can undermine you little by little. But you are not a stone: you can move!

Prayer Point

Lord, I pray that You would help me to develop a Godly character and start to live my life according to Your principles and not mine. Lord, I often refuse help or advice because I think I know best but today I break that stubbornness in Jesus' name and pray that I live life on Your terms and not mine. Put around me friends that build me up not pull me down, in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4 The danger of little things

'Catch ... the little foxes that ruin the vineyards'
Song of Songs 2:15 NIV

ON COLORADO'S LONG PEAK lie the remains of a giant 400-year-old tree. Age, storms, and avalanches couldn't bring it down. What did? A tiny beetle you could crush under your foot. It ate right through the bark and devoured its heart. Be careful: it's the little foxes that ruin the vineyards. Little attitudes – but if you practise them often enough, they become fixed attitudes. Little indulgences – but if you give place to them long enough, they desensitize you to sin.

Remember when certain things bothered you? Now you don't give them a second thought. You're being desensitised! Every alcoholic started by telling himself, 'I can handle it.' Every victim of internet pornography (and they're getting younger every day) started with a look,

got hooked on a fantasy, and ended up releasing a tiger that: a) can devour them, and b) will never willingly go back into its cage. Before a moral problem got out of hand in the Corinthian church, Paul hit it on the head. Listen: 'I also received a report ... One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother. And you're so above it all that it doesn't even worry you ... You pass it off as a small thing, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a "small thing," but it works its way through a whole batch ... get rid of this "yeast" ...' (1 Corinthians 5:1–7 TM). Strong language! Why does God make such a big deal out of this anyway? Because sin hurts us, and anything that hurts one of His children, makes Him angry.

DAY 5 The need to change

'You know these things – now do them. That is the path of blessing'
John 13:17 TLB

THERE'S AN OLD IRISH PROVERB that says, 'A bad habit's like a warm bed; easy to get into, but hard to get out of.' What are the habits you need to get into or out of? If you want to know where you'll be a year from now, check your daily routine. Change doesn't happen because of what you know; it happens because of what you do daily. James writes, 'Don't fool yourself ... letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear ... whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God ... and sticks with it ... will find delight' (James 1:22–25 TM).

What do you want at this time? Better health? A better marriage? A better prayer life? A better income? Unless a rich relative dies or you get an email from

Heaven telling you otherwise, you're going to have to: a) seek God, set down some written goals, and keep them before you constantly; b) devise a step-by-step plan for reaching them; c) stop time-wasting and start calling for more accountability from yourself; d) push, persist and persevere! Thomas Edison said, 'Opportunity is missed by most people because it comes dressed up in overalls, and looks like work'; and e) submit 'all of the above' to God for His approval, then make a start. Otherwise we'll be having this same conversation at this time next year. Jesus said, 'You know these things – now do them. That is the path of blessing' (John 13:17 TLB).

Prayer Point

I pray today, Lord, that You highlight the areas of my life that need to be brought in line with Your will. I desire to live a life of purpose and a life of complete fulfilment in You and pray that I can, with Your help, achieve all You have promised for me. Help me to be determined and focused to fulfil Your high calling for my life. Amen.

DAY 6 Don't look back

'Remember Lot's wife!'
Luke 17:32 NIV

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER told her class, 'Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt.' One child responded, 'That's nothing; my Mum was driving home yesterday, and she looked back and turned into a telegraph pole!' Lot's wife only appears briefly in one Scripture, so why did Jesus tell us to remember her? Two reasons:

1) She invested her life in something that had no future. John writes, 'The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever' (1 John 2:17 NIV). God tried to get Lot's wife out of Sodom, but He couldn't get Sodom out of her. When she thought of what she was leaving, she looked back and turned into a cold, unresponsive monument. When God says it's time to move, don't hesitate! Don't become like

those who once walked with Him, witnessed on the job, were shining lights in their communities, but now are cold and unresponsive.

2) Your decisions have consequences. If only she'd kept moving forward so that when her daughters got to the cave, she'd have been there to protect them. Instead, they became victims of abuse and incest. Before you lose your children, poison your marriage and tear up your life by refusing to break with your past, 'Remember Lot's wife.' She didn't make it to safety, but she did make it into Scripture long enough to warn us about three things: a) complacency, b) involvement with the wrong things, and c) a divided heart!

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DAY 7 The God of second chances '...We worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing' Luke 5:5 NLT

WHEN PETER SAYS: 'We worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing,' you can hear the discouragement in his voice. In spite of his skill as a fisherman, he keeps coming up empty. But all that changes when Jesus enters the picture and says, 'Go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets' (v4). The result? The Bible says: 'this time their nets were so full they began to tear!' (v6).

Maybe you are sitting where Peter sat; the outlook is bleak, your nets are empty, you have tried everything and nothing's working. Now you are ready to give up. One Christian leader writes: 'Some people have simply stopped expecting. They have accumulated so many of life's disappointments that they are afraid to dream, reach, stretch, or broaden their horizons. But God wants

us to take hold of tomorrow; He will not allow us to live in yesterday, or cast blame on anything or anybody that restricts our tomorrows.'

God knows how hard you have worked. He sees your discouragement and today He is inviting you to go fishing again; this time with Him. If you have been wrestling with addiction, depression, tormenting memories, financial failure, or sickness, do not jump ship! The Lord of new beginnings wants to come on board. He knows exactly where the fish are biting. He should; He put them there! So before you fold up your nets and dock the boat, look up and say, 'I'll do as you say, Lord, and let down the nets.' Go ahead; you will be glad you did!

DAY 8 Need more self-discipline? 'If you're serious about living this new resurrection life ... act like it' Colossians 3:1 TM

WHEN ASKED by a reporter who gave him the most trouble, DL Moody replied, 'I've more trouble with DL Moody than any man alive.' Sound familiar? Consider these words: 'An enemy I had, whose face I strove to know, for hard he dogged my tracks unseen wherever I did go. My plans he balked, my aims he foiled and blocked my onward way; when for some lofty goal I toiled, he grimly told me 'nay.' One night I seized and held him fast, from him the veil did draw; I looked upon his face at last and lo – myself I saw!'

Paul writes, 'I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified' (1 Corinthians 9:27 NKJ). In reading the lives of great people, you'll discover that the

first victory they won was always over themselves. They understood that their first responsibility was their own discipline and personal growth because you can't take others further than you yourself have gone.

Stephen Covey says, 'If I try to use strategies and tactics to get people to do what I want – while my character is fundamentally flawed – in the long run I won't succeed. My duplicity will breed distrust. Everything I do – even good human relationship techniques – will be perceived as manipulative. It makes no difference how good the rhetoric or the intentions; if there's no trust, there's no foundation for permanent success. Only integrity gives life to technique.' That just about says it all, doesn't it?

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DAY 9 Hey, wise up!

'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts'
Romans 13:14 NKJ

JOHNNY CASH SANG 'I keep a close watch on this heart of mine; I keep my eyes wide open all the time'. Good song; even better theology! Insanity is doing the crazy stuff others do, hoping for a better result. Wise up! David messed around with another man's wife and ended up with a blighted conscience, a ruined reputation, and two shattered families. Run while you still can! Sound old fashioned? Try talking to some of the folks you thought 'got away with it'. They paid in ways they don't like to talk about. Such as:

- 1) Fear: 'What the wicked dreads will overtake him' (Proverbs 10:24 NIV).
- 2) Lack of confidence: 'If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God' (1 John 3:21 NIV).

Prayer Point

Lord, help me to be more disciplined in my Christian walk. Forgive me, Lord, when things are busy and I haven't prayed or read Your Word. Let that be what I cling to in the busy times to find strength and fulfilment. Help me realise, Lord, that I don't know best; You do. In my times with You, let me hear Your still small voice and not dismiss it but act upon it, in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 10 I said I wouldn't, but I did!

'... I decide one way, but then I act another'
Romans 7:15 TM

ARE YOU FEELING DISCOURAGED, even disgusted with yourself? You said you wouldn't, but then the enemy put the pressure on and you folded like a house of cards. You're not alone. Paul writes, '...I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway ... Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does' (Romans 7:19–25 TM).

Why do we keep failing? Because flesh will always act like flesh! After a season of doing everything right, you can fall flat on your face because you 'give place to the devil' (Ephesians 4:27 KJV), or '[give] occasion to the flesh' (Galatians 5:13 KJV).

The story is told of an old Native American who,

3) Regret: 'I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly' (1 Samuel 26:21). Solomon had it all; a home that took 13 years to build, 40,000 stables for his horses, a fleet of ships, a thousand beautiful women and more money than he could spend in ten lifetimes. Yet he ended up turning his back on God and on the very advice he gave others. Why? Because he lacked personal discipline! Here's how he sums up his life in the book of Ecclesiastes: a) 'I denied myself nothing ...' (2:10 NIV), b) 'I hated all the things I had toiled for ...' (2:18), c) 'Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning' (4:13). Hey, wise up!

a few months after his conversion, came back to his pastor and said, 'It's as if I have two big dogs constantly fighting inside me.' 'Which one of them wins?' the pastor asked. After thinking about it, the old Indian replied, 'I guess the one I feed the most.' The power to live victoriously comes from feeding your spirit and disciplining your flesh.

Listen: 'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness ... He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires' (2 Peter 1:3–4 NIV). Spiritual growth doesn't just happen; you have to work at it daily.

DAY 11 Breaking habits

'The weapons we fight with ... have divine power to demolish strongholds' 2 Corinthians 10:4 NIV

WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH HABITS – what's yours? Be honest! For many of us it's our attitude that keeps us from growing, excelling and soaring to the heights God planned for us (Psalm 139:23–24 NIV). Bad habits are ways of thinking and acting that become part of our everyday lives; ways of trying to meet a need or fill a void. They're like crutches we use to get through life.

When a habit takes control of us, the Bible calls it a 'stronghold' (it has a strong hold on us). Do you have a habit you want to be set free from? As long as you think you can break it in your own strength, nothing will change. By operating in your own power, you're disconnected from God's power.

Prayer Point

Lord, I'm going to focus on the most influential habit in my life and remove myself from its grip in Jesus' name. I pray for Your help and guidance during the next few weeks as I break its stronghold in my life. Help me find a friend who I can be accountable to and I pray that You reveal encouragement to me in Your Word to keep fighting until this habit is overcome. Amen.

DAY 12 Power to quit

'... Honour God with your body'
1 Corinthians 6:20 NLT

ARE YOU A SMOKER? If you are, the odds are stacked against you. 'But it's my life,' you say. No, listen: 'You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body' (1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NLT).

Why indulge in a habit you wouldn't recommend to others, or risk not living long enough to fulfil your life's purpose? And what about those who love and need you? A lady wrote to columnist Ann Landers saying, 'A few weeks ago we buried one of the dearest people I've ever known. He was married for 43 years to our eldest sister. We adored him. He was meticulous about detail, the perfect choice to take charge of any family project; dependable, industrious, thorough. Integrity was his middle

Jesus said, 'No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.' (John 15:4 NIV). You must come to the place where you make a conscious decision each day, and sometimes each hour, to turn your life and your will over to God. To pray, 'Lord, I don't have the ability to overcome this. I choose not to give in to it. Strengthen me now by Your Spirit' is a prayer God will answer, for He always empowers our choices when they line up with His will! Whatever you're struggling with today, remember, 'we ... have divine power to demolish strongholds.'

name. But this man who did everything right, did one thing wrong. He smoked two packs a day for 30 years. This senseless addiction deprived him of the joy of seeing his grandchildren marry. It also denied us who loved him the pleasure of his beautiful presence. For God's sake, stop smoking. Do it for yourself and for the people who care about you.'

Are you like the man who said, 'Quitting's easy; I've done it a thousand times?' That's because you've tried in your own strength. The Bible says, 'But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God' (John 1:12 KJV). Make the choice, then turn to God and He'll supply the power to quit!

DAY 13 Clean-up time

'Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart'
Matthew 5:28 NLT

IT HAPPENED YEARS AGO to a prominent religious figure. His addiction to pornography was exposed, twice! Afraid, ashamed and alone, he wrestled with it, preached against it and prayed over it. When did his problem begin? As a teenager. Every time he picked up another pornographic magazine he filed a mental image for the enemy to pull up in moments of temptation. Ultimately it drove him to forfeit and destroy all he held near and dear.

Jesus said, 'Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart'. Are those words compelling enough to stop you from looking? Or are you willing to suffer the consequences of continually drinking from the well of sexual impurity? Sometimes the consequences

are difficult to envision, but they're there. They come in the form of lost opportunities for intimacy. Every lustful glance damages your marriage bond. The less you desire your mate, the more you'll look for things in them to justify your turning away. You'll become critical of them so that you can feel 'entitled' to play mind games with others who cross your path.

The saddest part is you'll never know what your marriage could have been because you chipped away at its foundation, one visual turn-on at a time. Today, turn to God in repentance. Ask Him to give you a clean heart (see Psalm 51). Then go home and fulfil the command, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25 NIV).

Prayer Point

Help me, Lord, to stop living in denial and admit to You the areas of my life where lust takes control. Father, I want to break free of this, I want to live a clean thought-life. I pray that from today, Your Holy Spirit would bring a sense of conviction over me every time I fall into this temptation so I would look away and focus on You.

DAY 14 Defences against lust

'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully...'
Job 31:1 NIV

TO WIN THE BATTLE against lust, you must decide once and for all to be fully committed to God. Steve Arterburn says that means establishing three perimeters of defence:

1) Your eyes. Job said, 'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully...' It's the lingering look that opens the door to trouble. Before David messed up with Bathsheba, we read that he: a) saw, b) inquired, and c) took. Train yourself to pull your eyes away immediately. What you're looking at isn't yours. God says, 'Leave it alone.'

2) Your mind. Paul writes, 'Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). Does your mind traffic in double-entendres, daydreams, the internet, magazines, movies, and anything else that can alter your mood at a glance?

Replace these things with memorised Scriptures and mental images of your best moments with your mate. It'll work! With your transformed mind actively policing itself and capturing rogue thoughts before they capture you, your defences will begin to grow strong.

(3) Your heart. Listen: 'Above all ... guard your heart' (Proverbs 4:23 NIV). Work on strengthening the bond with your mate. Begin to repay the debt you owe from the times you neither honoured nor cherished them. Decide to love, even though you don't 'feel' like it and watch yourself become their biggest fan. No matter how badly you've failed, victory can be yours if you're willing to humble yourself; ask for God's help and make a covenant with your eyes, your mind and your heart, to live in purity!

DAY 15 It's a process

'Unwrap him and let him go!'
John 11:44 NLT

WHENEVER YOU ACCEPT CHRIST, He changes you from the inside out. But certain experiences in your past can slow you down, keep you bound, and determine how you see yourself. While the Holy Spirit does the initial work, transformation is a process. It doesn't happen overnight; it takes time. When Jesus stood at His friend's grave and called, 'Lazarus, come forth', His friend who'd been dead for four days shuffled out, still bound from head to toe like a mummy. Notice, his old grave clothes which were a major hindrance to him, didn't just fall off the minute Jesus called him. No, Jesus told his friends 'Unwrap him and let him go!' and with their help, Lazarus was freed to pursue a new life.

The Bible says, 'anyone ... in Christ ... is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2

Corinthians 5:17 NIV). When Jesus saves you, you emerge from the tomb wrapped in the grave clothes of your past. What past? a) negative influences and thought patterns, b) low self-esteem, c) old addictions and habits, or d) destructive relationships. That's why God sends people to love you, unwrap you and release you into your potential. It's important that you identify these relationships and build your life around them. It's also why you need to develop an intimate relationship with God through prayer and Bible reading. Through His Word you get an accurate picture of how He sees you. Through prayer you get to know His heart and start seeing yourself through His eyes. When that happens, you'll never see yourself the same way again!

DAY 16 Worship your way through

'When he saw Jesus ... he ran and worshipped Him'
Matthew 5:6 NKJ

WOULD YOU like to stop wrestling with so many issues? Then learn to worship your way through them! The Bible says that when the man with the unclean spirit 'saw Jesus ... he ... worshipped Him.' Note, this man did not get healed first and worship later. No, after he started worshipping he was set free. There's an important principle here: Paul says, 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... in heaven, and ... on earth ... and ... confess that Jesus ... is Lord' (Philippians 2:10-11 NKJ), because even satan has to acknowledge God's ability and willingness to change your situation. James says, '...even the demons believe - and tremble!' (James 2:19 NKJ).

The Bible says, 'No weapon forged against you will prevail ... This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord...' (Isaiah 54:17 NIV). That includes anything that would rise up to destroy you and

your family; old wounds, painful memories, addictions, past sins, they must all bow in submission when the Name of Jesus is lifted up in praise. Notice, when the man from the tombs began to worship, the forces of evil cried out, 'What business do we have with each other ... Jesus ... Son of the Most High God?' (Mark 5:7 TM). The truth is satan's hosts have nothing in common with Jesus; no association and no alliance. And the only business He has with them is to cast them out! David said, 'my head is lifted ... above my enemies all around me ... I will sing and make melody to the Lord' (Psalm 27:6 NRS). Worship is one of the keys to your breakthrough. So run to Jesus today, fall at His feet and begin to worship your way through.

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DAY 17 Living in God's approval '...We have been approved by God' 1 Thessalonians 2:4 NKJ

LIVING in the approval of God is so liberating! It frees you from 'approval addiction' – worrying about what other people think. When you are addicted, no matter how much of your drug of choice you get, it's never enough; and like all junkies, you go crazy when your drug is withheld. Approval addicts are always at the mercy of other people's opinions. As a result their lives become an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows.

Paul was free to speak the truth in love: to confront people, or be gentle with them. When someone told Paul they didn't like him, he didn't lose sleep over it. That's because his life wasn't built upon their approval. Paul didn't go around needing to a) compare himself with others, b) demonstrate his superiority, c) impress or compete with others, or d)

be the top dog or the one who's always in charge. Living in God's approval set him free from such ulcer-inducing anxiety, and meant he could enjoy the life God called him to live.

When we're young and insecure we tend to worry about what others think of us, but as we become more mature, we realise that most of the time they weren't thinking about us at all. They were too busy worrying about what we thought of them! Living in God's approval frees us from all that stress. It gives us the strength to deal with criticism and conflict, because we know our identity. And our identity is this: we are God's redeemed children. And since we are accepted and approved by Him, what else matters?

DAY 18 The 'But God' factor 'But God ... hath raised us up' Ephesians 2:4–6 KJV

ULTIMATELY, there's nothing that can fill the emptiness of the human heart – but God. There's no solution to war, prejudice, and injustice – but God. There's no satisfaction for the cravings of the flesh – but God. There's no healing for the broken-hearted, lonely and desperate – but God. There's no turning point for human depravity – but God. There's no deliverance from addiction and heartache – but God.

The 'But God' factor breaks every generational curse that reaches you through Adam's sin. One Greek translation of the word 'spirit', is 'air'. When you were 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:1 NKJ), God breathed divine air into you. Paul says, 'And you [He made alive], when you were dead [slain] by [your] trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:1 AMP). The truth is, you never really lived until you met the Lord! The

'But God' factor turns tragedy into triumph. It is the turning point in your story. Hell would be partying today, 'but God' chose to lavish His mercy and grace on you. Listen: '...that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV). Rich in wisdom. Rich in achievements. Rich in relationships. Rich in 'all things'. Despite Satan's efforts to destroy, diminish, defame and discourage you, God never once took His hand off your life. He brought you to an understanding of Jesus as your Saviour and Lord; now He's raising you up to fulfil His purposes. No matter how bad things may look today, rise up and declare 'But God!'

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DAY 19 Lessons from a public house

‘...Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ John 13:35 NIV

CHUCK SWINDOLL WRITES: ‘One day, a Marine Corps buddy who came to Christ told me, “Chuck, the thing I still miss most is the fellowship I had with the guys at the pub. I can’t find it amongst the Christians I’ve met. I no longer have a place to admit my faults and talk about my struggles, where somebody won’t preach, frown, quote a verse, or blab it all over the place.”’

The local pub is an attractive counterfeit for the church. Ever watch Cheers? It’s an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, and escape instead of reality. But it’s an accepting and inclusive fellowship; brazen and democratic. You can tell them your secrets and they usually won’t tell others. It flourishes not because its patrons are

all alcoholics, but because each of us has a God-given desire to know and be known, love and be loved, and we seek these things for the price of a few beers.

Christ wants His church to be brazen; a fellowship where people can come and say, ‘I’m beat... I’ve had it,’ and find real answers! Now, before you shoot me for comparing your church to a pub, ask yourself a) if you discovered your spouse had been unfaithful, who could you confide in? b) if your biopsy confirmed cancer, who would you turn to? c) if you were lonely, where would you go? Jesus said, ‘...Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ And love isn’t what you say, it’s what you do!

Prayer Point

Father, help me find a group of friends that I can confide in and who can confide in me. Help me not to be so ‘standoffish’ with others and trust people enough to open up my heart in friendship. I pray, Father, that You bless and encourage me in this, that as my friends are honest with me, I see that as an opportunity to grow in You. Shape me for the greater good Lord, Amen.

DAY 20 A fruitful life

‘... He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more’ John 15:2 NIV

WITHOUT REGULAR PRUNING, a vine will live up to only a fraction of its potential. Vineyards have only one purpose – grapes! Energy spent on anything else, no matter how impressive is wasted.

Expert pruners have four things clearly in mind: a) removing anything that’s dead or dying, b) making sure sunlight gets to all fruit-bearing branches, c) increasing the size and quality of the fruit, and d) encouraging new fruit to develop. To make room for the kind of abundance God created you for, He will begin cutting away the parts of your life that are draining precious time and energy from what’s truly important. To accomplish this, He’ll even risk your misunderstanding of His methods and motives.

His purpose for you requires the cutting away of bad habits and attitudes, wrong relationships, lesser priorities – anything that distracts from your highest calling. Are you praying for God’s abundant blessings in your life? Are you asking Him to use you in His service? If so, you’re asking for the shears! Pruning is how God answers such prayers! If you’re being pruned today, follow these steps: a) pay attention. Don’t waste this season of preparation, and b) ask God whether you’re being pruned for greater fruitfulness or disciplined because of sin; there’s a difference. If it’s sin, repent and get back on track. If your response to the pruning process is right, your rewards will be great.

DAY 21 Making it happen

‘Wash thyself...’ Ruth 3:3 KJV

NAOMI TOLD widowed daughter-in-law Ruth to wash herself. Why? Because in order to gain favour with Boaz, she couldn’t approach him looking and smelling like Moab. She needed to wash away her past so that it didn’t threaten her future. If your life’s being polluted, it could be because you haven’t washed off where you came from. God will open doors for you, but until you’ve dealt with your past, you won’t be ready to walk through them. You can’t receive what He has for you now, if you’re still contaminated by what you went through then. Whether it takes six months or six years, wash it off – you can’t move on with God until you do! Sure, you might be academically, socially and intellectually prepared to move on; you might associate with people of influence and affluence;

but none of that matters. You’ll keep losing your blessing until somebody has the nerve to tell you to wash off your past.

We all know people who were delivered from things in their past but because they haven’t washed their faces, they still look like where they came from. For instance, you might be surprised to know how many married people still have several ‘partners’. We’re not talking about actual infidelity because legally they’re married to just one person, but mentally and emotionally they’re still tied to others in their past. You can’t enjoy what God has for you today, until you leave behind all your emotional baggage from yesterday. So get up and wash it off!

Prayer Point

Lord, I don’t want to drag the past around with me any longer. No matter the hurt or pain, I release it to You today. Help me, Lord, to become the person You desire me to be and to resist the enemy reminding me of the failure I was. The old me is dead, the new me is flourishing in Jesus’ name. Today is a new day, a fresh start, let me live a profound and blessed life. Amen.

DAY 22 A soil analysis

‘A farmer went out to sow his seed’ Matthew 13:3 NIV

THE SEED (God’s Word) is always productive and the Sower (the Lord) never deviates from His job. The only variable is the soil. That ultimately determines if the seed will be productive. Here Jesus discusses three kinds of soil. Check and see which one you are:

1) Hard: In Bible times, hard-packed paths often ran alongside the farmers’ fields. Any seed falling there just shrivelled and died. When you’ve been walked on and disappointed, unless you’re careful, you can become hard; you develop a tough, impenetrable shield that makes it easy for satan to come along and steal the seed before it has a chance to grow.

2) Shallow: In Jesus’ day, most farmland in the Holy Land was just a few inches of topsoil over rock, with nothing to sustain roots. Richard Foster says: ‘Superficiality is the curse of the age. We

live in a world of shallow relationships, superficial conversations, and hurried moments of prayer. We bounce from one spiritual activity to another without any real root system.’ Know anyone like that?

3) Overgrown: This soil is so overcrowded, there’s no room for anything else. Its nutrients are sustaining the weeds. Clutter happens easily, and is dangerous, because it’s so subtle. Ever notice how often you’re bombarded with guarantees that certain things will bring you happiness? Like the car manufacturer who advertised, ‘You can’t buy happiness; but you can lease it!’ Do a soil analysis today and weed out anything that’s hindering your spiritual growth. Once your heart is tender, your devotion deep, and your life uncluttered, you’ll be amazed at what God can accomplish through you.



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DAY 23 Getting a new wardrobe!

'If you're serious about living this new resurrection life ... act like it' **Colossians 3:1 TM**

TAKE A MOMENT and read these words from Colossians 3 in The Message. Don't just read them once – meditate on them, digest them, then put them to work.

'Your old life is dead ... that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God ... It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk. ... You're done with that old life ... It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe.

'Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with His label on it... So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it' (Colossians 3:3–14 TM).

Now go back and read those words again, asking God to help you make them a reality in your life today!

Prayer Point

I pray that today won't finish with a list of offences I've collected, Lord. I release to You anything the enemy would try and trap me with. Help me to daily live a life of forgiveness. Lord, help me to see You as the most important aspect of my life. Help me to focus on what You desire to see blossom in my daily walk. Let me focus on Your Kingdom, not mine. Amen.

DAY 24 Get rid of your idols

'...From all your idols, will I cleanse you' **Ezekiel 36:25 KJV**

WHATEVER TAKES God's place in your life is an idol. Get rid of it! That includes 'generational idols'. When Gideon tore down the altar his father had built to pagan gods, his family wanted to kill him (Judges 6:30). Why? Because that's the way things had always been in his family. Sound familiar? If your family system excludes God, it's got to be changed! Those who don't acknowledge God, play God! The rich young ruler wasn't lost because he had money; he was lost because money had him (Luke 18:22–23). It gave him his security and his self-worth. Nobody but God can reliably give you those things!

And how about your relationships? The Bible says, 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers...' (2 Corinthians

6:14 NIV). You can't put an ox and a donkey in the same harness and get any ploughing done, because their natures are different! When God tells you to let someone go but you hold on to them; it's idolatry (and insanity). Today, God is saying to you, 'I want to cleanse you from all your idols!' The weaning process may be painful because we all want what we want, when we want it. It takes real trust to know that you can give up what you have and get back something better. Whether it's a job, a relationship, a ministry or a poor career choice, your Father wants to wean you from the lesser and give you the greater. His plans are so much better than yours that, whatever it costs, it's worth the pain to make the switch!

DAY 25 Replace bad habits with good ones

'O God ... guide me on the road to eternal life'
Psalm 139:23-24 TM

ANY HABIT you keep feeding will only strengthen its grip on your life. Ask a recovering alcoholic – they only change when they 'hit bottom'. Prodigals don't come home until they've lost everything (see Luke 15:32). But that doesn't have to be your story, for your Father is waiting to welcome you back now! Come on, you're a child of the Most High; captivity is unnatural for you! You'll never be free until you despise your chains. Whether you're bound by a substance, a relationship, or a life that's out of order, your circumstances won't change until your mind is released from old thought patterns and renewed by God's Word (see Romans 12:2).

Start by instituting some new habits, for what you do habitually, you do permanently. Begin the Bible-reading habit. Put it first on your 'to do' list or you'll never do it

Prayer Point

Help me, Lord, to develop a really honest list of my bad habits and then guide me to replacements for each one that will build me up in You. I know that the journey to break these habits might be hard but You are there to help me through. In my weakness, I am made strong in You. I just turn to You today and turn away from the things that bring me down. Amen.

DAY 26 Dealing with your weakness

'He remembered that they were but flesh...'
Psalm 78:39 NIV

WE ALL HAVE WEAKNESSES, but the ones we refuse to deal with: a) draw us magnetically toward the wrong things, b) give satan a foothold, which quickly becomes a stronghold, and c) schedule tragedy down the line. Be warned: your weakness can emerge at any time, including your closing years! What you fail to master now will master you later. That's why David prayed, 'Cast me not off in ... old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth KJV' (Psalm 71:9). The Holy Spirit will repeatedly convict you before your weakness destroys you!

Jesus told Peter: 'Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.' (Luke 22:31–32

consistently. Read aloud and you won't get distracted so easily. 'Those who discover these words live, really live; body and soul, they're bursting with health' (Proverbs 4:22 TM). Next, learn to pray. Set a special time, otherwise everything else will crowd it out. In prayer, God will tell you how He feels about things. Can you imagine having His input? Attend church regularly. Support it with your finances and develop healthy relationships. There are things God will say to you in His house that He won't say anywhere else (see Hebrews 10:25). Your daily habits are carving out an irreversible future for you. If you want to know where you're going, take another look at your habits!

NIV). God will continue to use you even while your weakness is growing within you! That's because He's long-suffering and merciful. He provides opportunity after opportunity to reach for His help. Jesus warned Jerusalem, '... how often I have longed to gather your children together ... but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate' (Matthew 23:37–38 NIV).

Think: when you repeatedly reject God's mercy, what's left? The inevitable consequences! 'What can I do?' you ask. Turn to God! He's neither shocked by your weakness nor unwilling to help you. Confess your sin. Become an enemy to it. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you. Not only can He deliver you, He can turn your greatest weakness into your greatest weapon!

DAY 27 How can I change?

'...Be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind' Romans 12:2 AMP

ARE YOU WRESTLING with a certain problem, thinking, 'If I could just get beyond this, everything would be all right?' Sorry to disappoint you, but when you've conquered this particular problem, God will reveal something else that needs to be dealt with. Relax – you're always going to be working on something! Change doesn't come through human effort without God, frustration, self-rejection, guilt or the white-knuckling works of the flesh. No, change comes as a result of having your mind renewed daily by the Word of God. As you agree with God, believing that what He says is true, change automatically begins. You start to think differently, then talk differently and finally act differently.

Be patient with yourself: it's a process that develops in stages. Would you think there was something

Prayer Point

Lord, You never promised to remove problems but You did promise to be there with me through them and bring me to a place of overcoming them – I rest in that today. I ask, Lord, for a fruitful life in You, that all the promises of the years gone by would visit me like old friends to remind me of what Your desire is for my life. Build me up, Lord, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 28 Fruitful life

'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit' John 15:8 NKJ

DO YOU want to know the will of God for your life? Listen: 'I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain' (John 15:16 NKJ).

'But what if my branch is barren and my basket is empty?' you ask. Listen: 'Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away' (John 15:2 NKJ). 'Does that mean I lose my salvation?' you ask. No, Jesus was speaking about branches 'in Me', proving that it's possible to be 'in Christ' yet not be fruitful or enjoy the abundant life He wants you to have.

The Greek word for 'take away' is 'airo' which means 'to lift'. New branches have a tendency to trail along the ground. But they don't bear fruit there. When the

wrong with a child who couldn't walk perfectly the first few tries? No, you're delighted each time they take another step. When they fall you pick them up, comfort them, bandage them if necessary, encourage them to try again and keep working with them. Do you think God does less for His children? God's not angry with you because you haven't 'arrived'; He's pleased that you're pressing on, trying to stay on the path. It's God's job to '... [cause (you) to...be governed by the Holy Spirit]...' (2 Corinthians 3:8 AMP). If you could do it by yourself, you wouldn't need God! So instead of driving yourself harder and harder, start leaning on God more and more!

rain comes they get muddy and mildewed, sick and barren. So, does the vinedresser throw them away? No, they're too valuable for that. He goes through His vineyard with a bucket of water, looking for fallen branches, lifting them out of the dirt and washing them. Remember His words in John 15:3: "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (NKJ). Once they've been washed, He lifts them, wraps them around the trellis, ties them securely and pretty soon, they're thriving.

What a picture! Whether you've fallen into the dirt or you're just living beneath your potential, God won't throw you away. No, He'll lift you, cleanse you and help you to flourish again. Why don't you talk to Him today?

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