

# Breaking Addictions

Several years ago I ran into an old friend with whom I had once used drugs. He, like my wife Susan and I, had used drugs our entire adult lives, beginning around the year 1972. Susan and I had broken free in 1996; however, my friend Randy was not so fortunate.

When I saw him he appeared to be at death's door. After a long embrace I looked into his eyes, which were sunk way back into his head. I watched tears welling up. He told me how good I looked, and how proud he was that I was clean and sober. I looked him squarely in the eyes and said, "Randy, you don't have to live like this." He looked back at me with a perplexed look, cocked his head a little bit and said, "I don't?" No one had ever told him that before; Randy knew no other way. But here's good news—no one has to live with an overpowering addiction, including you.

For some people their lives are a lifelong search for pain relief. Pain comes in many forms (emotional and physical) and often for humans, so does pain relief (addiction). Believe it or not, an addiction is often a coping mechanism. The coping mechanisms which people use to get themselves through life come in two forms: substance abuse and people abuse, better known as substance addictions and behavioral addictions.

Substances most commonly abused are methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, as well as prescription painkillers. Behavioral addictions are much broader and more complex. They manifest themselves in a variety of ways ranging

from gambling, to anger, sexual addictions, jealousy, gossiping, media addictions, food addictions, overwork, or any other type of behavior that people might engage in that takes them away from reality.

## **Problems From the Start**

Often, the origins of addictions can be found in childhood. Although you were not aware of it, during the early years of your life, your brain was developing its own equipment and chemicals that were going to allow you to deal with life and its ups and downs. If this equipment did not develop to its full potential for whatever reason (physical abuse, verbal abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and so on), you would find yourself searching for other ways to cope with life.

You may find yourself in this situation right now, unknowingly trying to deal with scars and emotional distress from the past. You search for pain relief in a behavior or a substance that you know is not good for you, yet at the same time it's the only thing that can bring you relief. And you say in your heart, how can anyone take this away from me? It's the only way that I can deal with life.

Sometimes you can't even identify the pain and the problems that you're running from, and that is exactly what makes this kind of addiction so hard to break.

Another type of addiction results from simply fostering your natural human lusts. These addictions can form chains that bind you just as strongly as the other kind.

Both instances often seem like a hopeless situation, and believe me friend, I have been there. Your addiction is the habit that controls you; you don't control it. The habit tells you when and where to engage in it. To top it off, each time you make a decision for or against an addictive behavior, neural pathways are formed which further cement addictions.

## Overcoming

So, how do we change coping mechanisms? Or how do we break out of the ruts that are carved so deeply into our neural pathways from lustful habits? How can we, in our minds, construct a new future for ourselves? To fully answer that question for each individual is beyond the ability of this small tract. Each case is unique, and much of your recovery process requires individual attention and advice, some of which can be found at the end of this tract. But the first step, which is the same in all successful roads to recovery, is recognizing that you don't have to live with addictions and recognizing the source of the solution!

We have a Father in heaven who doesn't want us to live our lives chained to our addictions. He wants us to live free, happy, and healthful lives. He wants us to learn how to leave our past right where it is, in the past. He can be our new coping mechanism. He wants these things for us so much that He gave us His Son, and through that Gift gave us all the power needed to escape the chains which bind us. Listen to His promise: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the

temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Freedom is possible and even assured! God can break the addictive cycle in your life! He is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Has repeated failure taken hope from you? Focusing on your lack of ability and your failures is discouraging, but looking to God and trusting His power brings problems back to the right perspective.

Look at reality for a moment. The person you are inclined to trust the most is yourself. The problem is that we have proved time and time again that we don’t do a very good job managing our lives. To put it bluntly, we’ve trusted the wrong person. In Proverbs 3:5, the Bible says to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.” God says this for a reason. He knows that our understanding is faulty, He knows that we are emotionally scarred, He knows that we are doing the very best we can, but He also knows that we need to trust Him and His ability—otherwise our hope and motivation are gone. He has a new way mapped out for us, a way of systematically replacing bad behavior with good behavior, a way of changing those neural connections in the brain to work for good, to work for our advantage, and not to our detriment.

Jesus once asked a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). The blind man replied, “I want to see again.” Boiling it all down, Jesus was asking the man if he wanted to be made well. And today that’s His question for you, friend. You don’t have to live this way. Do you want to be made well? Do you want to

look into the recovery resources at the end of this tract? Do you want to stand up again and move toward freedom and peace? Only you can answer that question.