

Lose It for Life

Losing weight is a resolution you can keep, with God's help.

The Gay Marriage Debate

If you oppose gay marriage, you are labeled prejudiced and discriminating.

Teen Gambling

The prevalence of gambling has desensitized our kids to its consequences.

Are You Mad at Mom?

Reconciling a mother-daughter relationship requires both parties' input.

Teens and Self-Injury

It's Time to Confront

Confronting a Christian leader is difficult. But when we don't confront, the fallout is serious.

Compulsive Shopping

Shopping can be a seasonal balm for those who are depressed, lonely or anxious.

"I can't believe we owe this much money on our credit cards from the holidays! What happened? This debt will take months to pay off and has put us in serious financial trouble." "I'm sorry. I guess I spent a little too much. I didn't mean to put us in debt."

Now that Christmas has come and gone and credit card statements are rolling in, this short dialogue between a husband and wife is being heard in possibly 15 million households across America. According to a 2003 edition of *The Journal of Clinical Psychology*, binge shopping or compulsive buying is a problem for an estimated 2 percent to 8 percent of the population.

Compulsive spenders feel as if they are unable to resist buying and shop as a way to feel better. They either binge

shop or are compulsive buyers the entire year. The motto “shop till you drop” rules their lives.

Shopping can be a seasonal balm for those who are depressed, lonely or anxious during the holidays. But the consequences of uncontrolled buying hit hard in January and February when credit card bills begin to arrive.

Other times of the year, shopping may be used to numb feelings of anger, depression and loneliness. It serves as a momentary pick-me-up but ends in depression, financial hardship and relational problems.

If you tend to buy things that can't be paid for or purchase items that are completely unnecessary, compulsive shopping may be involved. Here are some warning signs. You:

- * shop when you are upset
- * feel a “high” when you purchase things
- * compulsively buy particular items
- * experience financial hardship as a result of too much buying
- * argue with others over your spending
- * don't use purchased items
- * feel out of control when spending
- * spend time juggling accrued bills
- * accrue an unmanageable credit card debt
- * intend to buy one or two items but buy many more.

Compulsive shopping affects more women than men. In some cases, people report an “emotional blackout” in which they don't remember even buying items. However, the root of this emotional addiction can be found when you look behind the activity and discover what feelings you are trying to mask.

Are you anxious, upset, lonely, fighting depression or having difficulty in a relationship? Could shopping be an activity that temporarily makes you feel better? Like other addictions, shopping is a behavior used to cover up negative feelings.

If you need help with compulsive spending, try applying these strategies to help break the cycle:

- * Stop making excuses and admit you have a problem
- * Get rid of your credit cards and pay with cash or check only. Hide one card for emergency use only. Let a spouse or trusted friend keep this card.
- * Make a list and buy only what is on the list. No exceptions.
- * Avoid sales and discount places that give a “deal.”
- * Avoid buying from TV shopping channels, catalogs and the Internet.
- * Leave your money, cards and checks at home when doing errands.
- * Substitute another behavior for the urge to shop—for example, walking, reading or praying.
- * Call someone for accountability when you have the urge to shop.

Most important, get to the root of the problem. Buying things will never fill the empty space inside. Only a deeper and more intimate relationship with God will ever satisfy your cravings. Self-control, which comes as a result of receiving and giving His love, will help you overcome your urges.

Instead of covering your negative feelings with temporary solutions, ask God to help you confront your areas of hurt and wounding. What is the lie that keeps you bound?

Jesus said, “‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’” (John 8:32, NKJV). Allow His truth and His love to fill your heart and mind. God wants you free of anything that controls you and keeps you in bondage.

Defusing 'Desk Rage'

The work environment has become a place of unleashed rage for too many Americans.

It's another day in the office and you have several deadlines to meet. As you open a document on your computer, the file shuts down and the computer freezes. "What?" you shout. "I need that file!" Then you begin pounding the desk and whispering things under your breath you don't want anyone to hear.

A grocery store supervisor checks the shelves and notices products are in the wrong place. He finds the worker responsible for the error and begins shouting at him for making mistakes. The worker lunges at his boss with a punch. Both fall and sustain minor injuries.

A salesman is called in to a special meeting in which his boss chews him out for low sales. His temper rises but he manages to remain composed—until he gets back to his desk. At that point he rips to shreds most of his papers and pushes everything off his desk in anger. Now he feels even more stressed because his desk is in ruins and he has torn up needed papers.

The work environment has become a place of unleashed rage for too many Americans. This behavior is something the media has dubbed "desk rage." That's right, you've heard of road rage and air rage; now we have to contend with desk rage.

From a psychological perspective, desk rage is simply rudeness, hostility, physical violence and aggression found in the workplace. A National Crime Victimization Survey (2000) found that Americans experienced approximately 2 million threats of violence and assaults at their workplace. Of that number, 1.5 million were simple assaults.

Another study from the University of North Carolina documented that half the workers interviewed worried about rude and hostile behavior directed at them. Their concern affected their productivity. Overall, revenue related to lost productivity, increased security, insurance-related payments, and other expenses is estimated to cost employers between \$6.4 billion and \$36 billion.

Why are so many Americans going postal? It appears that desk rage is triggered by stress—boredom, anxiety, lack of control, demands of the job, overcrowding, noise and so on. Employers are trying to deal with the problem by finding solutions that decrease stress, such as more flexible work hours or improved benefits, but these aren't enough.

People have to learn anger management, ways to assert themselves positively and constructive ways to handle their negative emotions. In a nutshell, people need stress management. Try these tips from my *Breaking Free From Stress* booklet:

Be ready and accepting of change. Change is inevitable in today's work environment. Be ready for it instead of resisting it. Accept what you can't change.

Don't panic if you are laid off. With corporate downsizing, global market changes, outsourcing and so on, people lose their jobs even when they do well at them. Remember, God is your provider.

Explore fields that are growing. Skill development makes you more marketable. If you haven't already done so, get a quality education.

Be a good steward of your finances. Don't spend beyond your means or rack up credit-card debt. Put money away for a difficult time.

Maximize your work time. Be clear on what is expected so you

know how you will be evaluated. Minimize distractions.

Have integrity on the job. Do not compromise your beliefs, and line up your behavior according to biblical directives.

Be balanced. Have a life after work that involves relaxation, family, friends and a vibrant spiritual walk. Don't let go of your sense of humor. It relieves stress.

Don't easily take offense. People in the workplace won't always behave properly. Offer forgiveness even when it isn't requested. You be the model of Christ! Your influence could make a difference.

If you need additional help, pick up a copy of *Breaking Free From Anger and Unforgiveness*. Stress will never disappear, but our reaction to it can be godly.

Gender Equality

The model Jesus gave us was one of being equally submitted to one another.

Stressed-Out Kids

Today, American children are exposed to distress at earlier ages than in the past.