

8 Steps to Breaking Addiction in Your Life

It's 6 a.m., and the alarm is beeping relentlessly. Decision time: Slap the snooze bar, or up and at 'em?

These days my feet hit the floor with great anticipation for what the Lord has planned for me. In prayer and in His Word, I get my marching orders for the 24 hours ahead.

It was not always that way. Before my life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ in 1980, my bed was my hiding place; the clock, my enemy; sleep, an **idol**. If only I could hide in eternal night, free from the responsibilities of marriage, family, life in general. I hated myself, and I was sure God hated me too.

Each new day was **torment** for me. Desolate, **depressed** and despairing, I held my husband and children hostage with my unpredictable mood swings. The addictions and compulsive behaviors that wreaked havoc in my life were like idols on a throne: alcoholism, prescription drugs and a host of **cross-addictions** to such things as **cigarettes**, soap operas, the occult, shopping, exercise, volunteering, food and toxic relationships.

My life was out of control. If one thing didn't work, I'd try another. And another. Even death began to seem like a welcome change of scenery.

Little did I know that the Divine Physician stood patiently by, waiting for me to surrender my destructive self-will to Him. His plans were to heal me and prosper me, to give me a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

But I was too distracted by my idols to notice.

A Recipe for Pain

How did I arrive at such a place of **pain, shame** and **rage**? Actually, I followed the classic recipe. Place the following ingredients in a mixing bowl:

- A **dysfunctional** family in which the child's physical, emotional and spiritual needs are not met
- One or two **addictive parents**, hooked on something—alcohol, drugs, work, food
- Abuse—sexual, emotional or verbal
- Poor personal boundaries
- Fear of **rejection** or **abandonment**

Add a heaping spoonful of shame. Fold in unforgiveness, rebellion, pride. Add a pinch of perfectionism, control, low self-worth, anxiety and denial. Sift in generational curses and family secrets.

Mix thoroughly until batter is well-blended. Warning: Mixture will tend to be lumpy. Bake anyway for several years in an alternately hot and cold oven.

My dad was a workaholic; my mom, a ferocious fighter of dust and wrinkles (she had OCD, or obsessive-compulsive disorder). I was an only child, the glue in their loveless marriage. When I was 5, an uncle sexually molested me.

As an adult, I was an easy mark for Satan's heavy artillery of addictions, compulsive behaviors and unchecked emotions. These became idols that usurped God's rightful place in my life—just as the enemy had intended.

Bill W., founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, called addictive behaviors "self-will run riot." Self, the baby, wants the throne all to itself, surrounded by its toys: alcohol, drugs, shopping, sex, work—the list is endless.

But there is good news. Our wonderful Father God will move

heaven and earth on our behalf to set us free from compulsions and addictions by the power of His Holy Spirit. His arm is not too short to reach us in the deepest pit of our sin and rebellion.

The key word: surrender. We must surrender our self-will and seek God's will for our lives.

Tearing Down Idols

The flesh is a relentless, carnivorous beast. Its insatiable appetite cannot be appeased—except by divine intervention and healing.

If only we would realize that Christ alone can meet the needs we attempt to satisfy by indulging our fleshly desires. In Him, we can be overcomers; with Him, nothing is impossible. All other idols must fall away when we put Him on the throne of our lives.

Idolatry occurs whenever we put anyone or anything—spouses, children, careers, ministries, addictions—equal to or above God. When we are more responsive to their demands than to His will, we've plunged into idol worship.

God is a jealous God. He will share His glory and His rightful place in our lives with no other. "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God," He told us (Ex. 20:5, NIV).

God created us to have fellowship with Him. In fact, this is the reason He sent Jesus—to restore the intimacy He had with us before Adam and Eve destroyed it in the Garden of Eden.

God's love toward us is like a refiner's purifying fire (Mal. 3:2-3). When we feel as if the heat is being turned up underneath us, it probably is!

God is shaking everything that can be shaken in our lives, our families and our churches so that all the idols we have put before Him will fall down. He is preparing a bride who will

have neither spot nor wrinkle.

Our compulsions and addictions must fall! Embracing the purification process is the first step toward true freedom in Christ. To begin, you must:

1. Repent of your idolatry. “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices’” (Ezek. 14:6).

2. Seek His forgiveness for your specific acts of idolatry. List them. Ask Him to do “divine angioplasty” on your heart, to surgically remove bitterness, judgments and unforgiveness. What wounds, what negative attitudes are hiding there? Ask Him to reveal the root causes of your struggle so that you may be healed and set free.

3. Be reconciled to those you have “aught” against or who have “aught” against you. Remember, forgiveness is not an option if we want the Lord to forgive us. It is a decision of the will; the feelings will follow.

Perhaps the greatest access Satan has to the church is our unwillingness to forgive those who have offended us. Be reconciled now—to God, to others and to yourself.

4. Accept the fact that you must change certain things in your life. As the saying goes, “If nothing changes, nothing changes.”

5. Prioritize your life. Your priorities are out of kilter if they’re not God first; your family, second; and work or ministry, third.

6. Take an inventory of the stumbling blocks in your life—those people, things and circumstances that seem to trip you up on a regular basis. How do they interfere with your relationship with God, your family, your work?

7. Make good friends of discipline and obedience. They work together as a matched pair. You'll sabotage your journey to freedom without them.

8. Most importantly, give the Lord the "first fruits" of all you have and all you are. Spend quality time with Him each day in prayer, meditation, reading His Word. Praise Him! Worship Him! Adore Him! He already adores you. Even though you may feel like a miserable failure, in His eyes you are a winner—an overcomer.

He created in each of us a special "God-space," a place in our hearts that is His alone. It's His sanctuary, His throne room. False idols are not allowed!

He reigns sovereign and supreme in His great glory, and He calls us to join Him: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

The Hound of Heaven

My life turned around miraculously in 1979. A faithful group of prayer warriors in Billings, Mont., where I lived at the time, put me on their "Ten Most Wanted List." They had heard of my third suicide attempt and my admission to the Montana State Mental Hospital at Warm Springs.

"Lord," they prayed, "send someone across Sandy's path to tell her how much You love her."

A beautiful young woman named Karen appeared at the hospital. She'd lost her fiancé in an automobile accident and was inconsolable. Daily she cried out to Jesus.

She became my "hound of heaven," following me constantly and telling me that Jesus loved me and had a plan for my life—a plan that didn't include destroying myself.

How could He love a pile of garbage like me? I wondered.

Then one night, Karen awakened me from a deep sleep. She had a desperate look in her eyes. "Does Jesus love me, Sandy?" she wailed.

I struggled out of bed and held her in my arms. She was like a sobbing child.

"Yes, Karen," I said. "Jesus loves you." And at that moment, everything changed. It was as though my body had been struck by lightning.

I knew that I had been touched miraculously by God's mighty hand. In those predawn hours, the idols on my throne began to shake at their very foundations. I knew I would never be the same.

A few years later, wanting to send Karen a copy of my book, *The Compulsive Woman*, I wrote the institution to try to track down her address. I gave them all the identifying information I could think of.

A few weeks later, they sent a reply: There was no record of a patient named Karen fitting that description. Karen, I believe, was an angel sent by God to rescue me—to pull me out of the miry, hellish pit of life-threatening addictions and compulsions and set my feet on the solid Rock of my salvation.

My odyssey back from that pit was not easy. God used a combination of the spiritual and the secular: alcoholism treatments, group therapy, intense counseling, alcohol support group meetings and prayer, prayer, prayer. He lovingly tailor-made just the right recovery program for me. The process took time, hard work, patience and a crucial ingredient: a sense of humor.

And God's not done with me yet. After conquering many addictions and compulsive behaviors with His help, I found myself raising up a new idol after the death of my beloved husband, Len, in 1996.

It seemed as if bedtime was not such a monster if I ate a pint of toffee-crunch ice cream first. After months of this decadent nightly ritual, I wondered why my clothes were shrinking. I was literally swallowing my grief—"eating" my feelings of loneliness and sadness so I wouldn't have to feel them.

But the Lord didn't let me get away with hiding in my compulsion and denial. Once again, He led me to surrender my self-will to Him, and another idol came crashing down.

One by one by one, the idols in my life have been replaced by the only One to whom all praise and worship is due. Today I am a new creation, free in Christ! "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36, NKJV). And if Jesus set me free, He will do the same for you.

Read a companion devotional.

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