

How You Can Break the Heavy Chains of Addiction

I was walking briskly from one terminal to another at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. Suddenly, I felt a tugging at my sleeve from a man who recognized me. I had no idea who he was, but his words got my attention:

"Thank you for saving Jenny's life."

I've received many such compliments through the years, but I give all praise to God. I share the stories of people like Jenny—who have overcome the chains of addiction through the supernatural power of faith—because they hold deep spiritual truth and practical principles far more significant than any praise.

The man who approached me that day was a pastor, and Jenny was a member of his church. At the time I met her at a conference, she weighed over 350 pounds, and her addiction to food was killing her. Food dominated and controlled her life. She was incapable of resisting it.

I asked her if she had always been so overweight.

"No."

"So when did you start putting on weight?"

"About 10 years ago."

She described how she came home one day to discover a cryptic note attached to her refrigerator door by a magnet. On it, her husband had written, "You won't be seeing me again. Goodbye."

The shock traumatized her and broke her heart. She opened the refrigerator door and, in an effort to comfort herself, reached for whatever food she could find. Ten years later,

still with a broken heart and all her emotions locked in that moment of time, she was still trying to comfort herself with what had now become a food addiction. Jenny was dying, one snack at a time.

She had tried endless diets and healthy eating programs, but diets will never cure a food addiction. Each and every failed diet compounds the inner pain and drives a person back to the only thing they know that will give them relief: food. But more food will never cure a broken heart. The unhealed pain always fuels the need for false comfort.

I shared with Jenny that Jesus commands us to forgive others, and I asked Him to help her to do so. She understood and spoke out words of forgiveness to her former husband. I prayed that, as Isaiah had prophesied in Isaiah 61:1, Jesus would heal her broken heart and set her free from the work of the enemy, who had been holding her in bondage.

In just a few minutes of sharing and prayer, the Holy Spirit moved to break addiction's power. Jenny now has the freedom to rebuild her life without the enemy constantly dragging her back into a pit of addictive despair.

Find the Root

Twelve months later, in the middle of O'Hare Airport, I heard the full story of her life-transforming healing experience. God supernaturally freed her of her food addiction and saved her life.

Of course, Jenny is not the only Christian to have struggled with personal addictions. There are many believers who came to Jesus, as the old hymn expresses it, "Just as I am." But without an understanding of how the Christian message is both a saving and a healing message, they have a different life experience: "Just as I was when I came, I still am!"

They sing with enthusiasm the eternal truths, such as those

expressed by Charles Wesley in his most well-known hymn, "And Can It Be": "My chains fell off, my heart was free/I rose, went forth and followed Thee."

In reality, however, they remain in chains, often of their own making. They try to follow Jesus while at the same time living lives controlled by addictive behavior rooted in their carnal nature, which thrives on an unhealed past.

In Ephesians 4:22 (NIV), Paul warns of the dangers of the old self being "corrupted by its deceitful desires" and in verse 27, he adds to this by saying, "do not give the devil a foothold." Sadly, many of those who wrestle with addictions have opened themselves up to deceitful desires. As a result, they struggle. The enemy has used his foothold to gain access, and they now need deliverance as well.

But don't fall into the trap of thinking the answer to all addictions is deliverance. People suffering from addiction may need deliverance, but first they need to face themselves, understand the reason the enemy has gained access and deal with the real issues. Only then will deliverance prove effective.

Deliverance without healing will not deal with the inner unhealed reality. And failure to deal with the real problem, will lead people into a downward spiral of despair when they realize that nothing has changed and there seems no hope of escaping their addictive trap. Ultimately, this will give the enemy even greater control over their lives.

Jenny's problem presented as a food addiction—but food addiction wasn't the real problem. Prayer to control the addiction hadn't helped at all. I didn't pray that God would heal her desire for food. I prayed that God would heal the reason behind her constant need to use food to comfort herself. That's why she experienced healing.

This central principle underlies the healing of most

addictions. When facing the challenge of walking out of such strongholds, people must begin by asking:

- When did the addiction begin?
- What happened to start it all?

People will only receive healing if they face the truth about themselves with brutal honesty. Even if these questions don't have an immediate answer, they make a great place to start praying for the Holy Spirit's help in understanding the roots of addiction. Knowing how things began—and why—provides vital keys for overcoming the addiction's power and control.

Addictions thrive on ignorance of the truth. Jesus knew what He was talking about when He said, “the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32b).

When you discover what lies at the root of an addiction, you have taken the first huge step toward overcoming it.

Jenny needed to both forgive her husband and confess her own sin of trying to deal with the pain caused by her broken heart in an ungodly way. Scripture refers to our bodies as “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19a). To abuse them in this or any other way is, therefore, an act of rebellion against our Creator.

Face the Truth

One of the biggest problems with helping people face their addiction problem is the cycle of guilt and shame, often followed by deception—both self-deception and deceiving others about the existence and the extent of the problem.

Guilt, shame and deception have a particular potency in alcohol, drug and sexually related addictions. The fear of exposure dominates behavior. Pride drives the need to cover up the truth, for the sake of one's reputation or standing—especially within the personal family and the family

of God in the church. Just as Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves and hide from God, people try to cover up their addictions and hide them from others.

Pride can then become the ultimate controlling power in a person's life. But the time will eventually come when the truth can no longer remain hidden, and everything comes out into the open—often with catastrophic consequences.

In recent years, a growing number of senior leaders in the church have had their sexual addictions devastatingly exposed, causing untold harm to spouses, children and the wider body of Christ, all left feeling betrayed. No wonder we read in Proverbs 16:18a that “Pride goes before destruction” and in James 4:6b (NIV) that “God opposes the proud.” But James also points to the way out of the trap when he says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Whoever you are and whatever position you may hold, if you live under the power of out-of-control addictions, waste no time in facing the truth about yourself. If you need help, swallow your pride and waste no time in getting it.

Food-related addictions have many possible causes. While some of these addictions arise from following an out-of-control parental role model, the majority have false comfort as their driving force, often driven by the unhealed inner pain of rejection and emotional damage.

Some food addictions have their origin in sexual abuse. Victims often view an attractive body as the cause of the abuse, so they also perceive overeating and consequential weight gain as a defense against further trauma.

Scripture does not forbid drinking alcohol, but it does give plenty of warnings about the dangers wine and beer can cause, which should be sufficient for the Christian to understand the spiritual red flag attached to the need for “another drink”

(Prov. 23:35c). Do we really need that next drink, or does it act as an alcohol-driven cover-up for unhealed inner pain?

The problem that lies behind the consumption of excess alcohol and drugs is that the body must adapt its chemistry to process them, a change that requires feeding to maintain. At that point, the body dictates the terms of engagement and demands another drink” or “another dose.” Alcohol or drug dependency quickly takes root, its controls are not easily overcome and broken. Regular accountability to someone else who has knowledge of your problem is essential given both spiritual and physical effects. Medical research documents addiction’s serious and potentially life-threatening consequences to long-term health and well-being.

Break the Yoke

The addictions men most commonly experience have their focus on sex—usually pornography, consequential masturbation and, sometimes, the need for regular sexual gratification with a partner outside of a godly marital relationship. Paul describes all of these in his letters to the Ephesians and the Galatians as “sexual immorality,” “impurity” and “greed,” stating that “these things are improper for God’s holy people” (Eph. 5:3b).

Clearly, God blesses sexual relations within the context of marriage, but sexual desire is a powerful force, and addicts often seek different forms of sexual gratification outside of normal marital relationships.

Michael was hooked on pornography. Even before the proliferation of sexually specific images on the internet and social media, he would seek every possible secret opportunity to look at pornographic pictures and films, with the inevitable consequence of lust-inspired masturbation, guilt and shame. No matter how hard he tried, he felt powerless to resist the addictive temptation. He had no understanding of

the hidden driving force in his life.

He knew this wasn't the way of life for any Christian, never mind a Christian leader. Treading a dangerous path, he lived in constant fear of exposure. He desperately wanted to preserve the sanctity of his marriage covenant and his ministry, but he knew his whole world was in danger of collapsing at any moment. He eventually broke the torment of his personal silence about the issue and asked for help.

Buried within his childhood memories lay a day when, alone in the house, out of curiosity, he explored some of his dad's books in a cupboard. Hidden behind the books sat a pile of pornographic magazines—a traumatizing moment for an innocent boy who had never seen anything like that. He tried to bury the memory of the experience, but deep inside, he wanted to see more. Now, 40 years later, he still had the compulsion to see more but didn't understand why he couldn't control the driving force within.

Michael came to realize that his father's sins had left him spiritually uncovered. God gave him the power to forgive his father and receive healing for his childhood broken heart, breaking the driving addictive force behind his temptations. Only then could he bring to the Lord the hundreds of times he fell into the same sin as his father, and receive forgiveness and healing. He knew he would still have to face and resist similar sexual temptations in the future, but now, the Spirit had broken their addictive power.

Many other behavioral addictions can control people's lives—everything from compulsive exercise to perfectionism, from anorexic fears to watching TV. But whatever your addiction may be, know this: Addiction is a thief!

Addictions can rob you of time, of money, of well-being, of physical health, relationships and even your job. They can destroy your life's calling and destiny. Above all, they can

rob you of the precious relationship with the Lord, which should be every Christian's inheritance from a loving Father.

As Jesus made clear to the Pharisees (John 8:42-44), the devil is a liar, a thief and a murderer. He is a false father, and he uses addictions as one of his favorite means of controlling our lives. Never forget that, as Paul declared to the Galatians, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). Addictions are indeed that: a yoke of slavery.

We have explored many different root causes for addictions, but none of them stands beyond the healing power of Jesus. And no matter how guilty you may feel, what Jesus did for you at the cross is sufficient for every need.

Jesus came to heal the broken-hearted and set the captives free—and that includes you!

READ MORE: Find God's power to break addictive strongholds revealed at.

Peter Horrobin is the author of Discover Healing and Freedom and Forgiveness—God's Master Key, available at the Ellel USA Bookstore () or wherever fine books are sold. For other books by Peter Horrobin, visit

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