Compulsive Shopping

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“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.