

# How to bust your addictions!

## *Living the New Life:*

Romans 7:14-24

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Bethany Church

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God, who knows the number of hairs on your head, who loves you intimately, certainly cares about your struggles. God knows what trips you and traps you. God knows all about compulsive drinking, gambling, eating, worry, spending, voyeurism and the like. God knows all about will power and addiction. It is not an accident that as part of the Jesus' Church in Rochester, Bethany's mission is to *go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ*. Bethany at its founding was about helping people experience the freedom of new life in Jesus.

The Bible teaches that addictions or compulsive behavior are remnants of a deceitful and destructive life. The Apostle Paul describes this struggle in Romans 7. What we don't realize is that Paul captures exactly what overcomes these addictions in Romans 8. He writes:

*In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:37-39, NIV)

The Bible teaches that we are equipped in Christ to overcome everything within and without... **because through Christ God is invading a world of death with his Spirit of life.** From the last verse of Romans 7 to the last verse of Romans 8, Paul reveals the answer for our struggles with addiction. Before exploring that, let's consider three biblical images of addiction.

The first is a *Roped Gulliver*. Gulliver, a fictional character in English literature, washed up on an island of little people. They tied him up, but because of his size and strength he broke

free. Ironically, King Solomon, who suffered serious addictions that led to his destruction, gives us that image. He wrote through God's Spirit:

***The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.*** (Proverbs 5:22-23, NIV)

Each evil or harmful deed that we do fastens a rope that ensnares and holds us down. Unlike Gulliver we don't possess the strength, discipline or wisdom to overcome the ropes.

A second biblical image is of a *Captured City*. Once again King Solomon writes:

***Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.*** (Proverbs 25:28, NIV)

In Solomon's time, enemies would breakdown the walls of city to take it captive. Without walls the people were defenseless to any invading force. Likewise, when a boundary with our temper, eating, drinking or any other behavior is broken, these destructive forces take us captive. When a boundary goes down, whatever fits into the hole will get through it and hold the person hostage. Thus, few people are addicted to just one thing. Most people have multiple addictions. Alcohol Anonymous meetings are often smoke-filled; and frequently, people will transfer their allegiance from one enemy like smoking to another like eating. The point is that it is not good enough to evict an enemy or addiction. You must also rebuild the wall.

A third biblical image of addiction is a *Haunted Loner*. We meet one in the gospel of Mark. He writes:

***When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.*** (Mark 5:2-5, NIV)

This is the most extreme and hopeless picture we have of an individual in the Bible. I've never seen a secular treatment program free a person so tormented. Most, if out of such a program, are on heavy doses of medication. Yet, there is a growing body of people in the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran churches, Anglican and United Methodist who are seeing the hopeless healed. Some people aren't healed until what Jesus addressed in this man is addressed in them.

These three biblical images where cords must be cut, walls must be built and, or spirits must be expelled, reveal why some people experience freedom with prayer, while others need accountability groups, and others still must go through residential treatment programs, counseling, deliverance sessions and spiritual mentoring. Although the path to freedom may vary with the nature of one's struggle, there are three important principles.

**Principle One is that there is no condemnation in Christ.** This is so important. You already know how one must overcome a defeatist attitude before they gain victory. Although that principle is universally acknowledged, without forgiveness and a reason for forgiveness, you are obliged to and defined by everything you've done. All of that changes with Christ. Outside of Christ, you are a sinner. In Christ, you are a saint purchased out of judgment. Outside of Christ, you are an addict. In Christ, you are child of God and a ruler of the earth. Outside of Christ, you are subject to the law of sin and death. Your desires led you to violate the DOs and DON'Ts of God's law. These violations bring you judgment. Spiritually and physically, you are handed over to the consequences of your sin and the powers that incited you. However, when Jesus gave himself for us on the cross, he released us from that judgment so that God himself could live in us and make us like Gulliver who snapped his ropes. When the Spirit of Jesus indwells you, you have Jesus' ability and mind in infant form. You have Jesus' potential to live a godly life. You can snap cords, rebuild walls, and live holy rather than haunted and hostage.

With the Spirit of life, the issue goes beyond the addiction to living and doing the will of your Heavenly Father.

**Principle Two is to welcome the mind of Christ.** To do that, we must embrace Christ's focus and vision. Since God made you and loves you, self-destructive habits are wicked, an affront to God. They degrade and destroy a creature of God, and betray the image of God in which you were made. Denial, dismissal or lie is the most prominent feature of addictive behavior. The biblical term *flesh* or *sinful nature* describes your soul and body working without the influence of God's Spirit. It describes a body and soul operating on lies. So are you in community that focuses on the desires of the flesh or the desires of the Spirit?

The mind of Christ sees the future. In Romans 8:10 Paul writes that if we are in Christ, our body is dead because of sin, but our spirit is alive because of righteousness. He says that we are carrying the sentence of death in our bodies. There are all kinds of pains and destructive cravings because our bodies suffer from the poison pill of sin that the human family has swallowed. This condition goes well beyond addiction, but it certainly includes it. However, through God's righteousness we experience a spiritual resurrection that one day will be physical. We are made alive in our spirits. In other words, what God is doing with our hearts brings life to our mortal bodies and one day will result in immortality. That is Jesus' perspective. Again, the Spirit of life has invaded a world of death and is transforming it.

**Principle Three is our hope through Christ.** It answers the question, "What will you become?" Through the Spirit of life, God is restoring you as his child and a ruler on earth. In hope, you must make deadly decisions. Through the Spirit, you identify the misdeeds of the body, count those cravings dead and heed God's counsel. You are given the Spirit of *sonship* so

that you, like Jesus, can know and do the will of your Heavenly Father. In hope, you share in Christ's sufferings, denying your body's demands, to sew life and share in Christ's glory.

Whatever the struggle, God can make you bigger than it through the Spirit. The truth is your weakness is an opportunity for God to show his strength. Whatever the addiction, whatever the bondage, whatever the struggle, whatever gets the best of you, the law of the Spirit of life will work to free you. The cords can be cut, the walls rebuilt and the torment gone. Will you open up your heart and life to God's Spirit at work? Will you let God's Spirit form you as he works through the body of Christ? There's great power when you receive prayer, fellowship, teaching, accountability and learn the tough work of obedience in hope. God is doing that among us, and he has an amazing new life for you. What step do you need to take? What step will you take?