

Freedom From Addictions¹



SABBATH—MARCH 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 23:29–35; 1 Corinthians 7:2–5; Matthew 25:15–30; Mark 10:17–27; 1 Peter 3:3, 4.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘So if the Son of Man sets you free, you will really be free’ ” (John 8:36, NlrV).

IN RECENT YEARS, MANY PEOPLE HAVE BROKEN FREE from political slavery. But there is another kind of slavery that can be just as bad, or worse, than political slavery. Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs have enslaved millions. More and more people are enslaved to nondrug addictions, such as sex, pornography,² gambling (or risky investments), and spending money.

All addictions make people dependent upon the addiction. Each time people take drugs, they need a little bit more the next time to have the same effect. This is why it is so difficult for addicted people to break away from the trap they find themselves in. Those who are trapped need support from family, church, and friends. They also might need professional help. But most of all, they need the power of God working in their lives to give them the freedom promised in Christ the Lord.

1. addictions—strong and harmful needs to regularly have something (such as a drug) or do something (such as gamble).

2. pornography—movies, pictures, magazines, and so on that show or describe naked people or sex in a very open and direct way in order to cause sexual excitement.

SUNDAY—MARCH 6**ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES
(Proverbs 23:29–35)**

In the Western world, wine, beer, and other alcoholic drinks have been connected with memorable events, happy times, holidays, and important business deals. There seems to be a clean and beautiful face to alcoholic drinks. They have become socially acceptable and almost “necessary” at certain times. But, sadly, there is a dark side to alcohol that those who sell it do not want their customers to see and know.

What does Proverbs 23:29–35 say about the terrible results of alcohol? In your own experience, how have you seen the use of this poison (alcohol) destroy people’s lives?



There’s a dark side to alcohol that those who sell it do not want their customers to see.

The image (picture) of beautiful wine biting like a snake and poisoning like a viper (poisonous snake) is powerful. The chemical makeup of alcohol causes the human body to treat it not as food but as poison. It is taken into the stomach and carried by the bloodstream to the brain, lungs, kidneys, and heart in just a few minutes. The liver becomes weakened from hours of breaking down alcohol and then trying to rid the body of the poison. If drinking alcohol is continued for a long time, the organs³ will wear out. And the person will suffer from serious illnesses.

Sadly, the results of drinking alcohol go beyond the drinker. Alcohol use comes with a terrible social cost. Half of all automobile and workplace accidents are the results of alcohol. Many crimes are done under the influence⁴ of alcohol. Public and private funds are used to provide health care for problems caused by alcohol. And, at home, the spouse and children of heavy drinkers are often victims of verbal and physical abuse.

Alcohol and other drugs influence⁵ our ability to make the right choices. Under the influence of alcohol, people are likely to slip deeper into sin.

Those trapped in any kind of drug abuse need to understand their problem and their need for help from God. Along with God’s grace,⁶ they need the support of family or a caring church community. They also need to get treatment from professionals (if

3. organs—parts of the body, such as the heart or liver, that have a particular function.

4. influence—the power to change or affect something.

5. influence—to affect or change someone or something.

6. grace—God’s free gift of mercy.

possible) who are trained to deal with these problems.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we take a very strong stand against alcohol use. Without judging or condemning them, how can we help those among us who are struggling with this problem?



The image of beautiful wine biting like a snake is powerful.

MONDAY—MARCH 7

SEX ADDICTION (Proverbs 5:18, 19)

What does the Bible say in Proverbs 5:18, 19 and 1 Corinthians 7:2–5 about sex as part of enjoying and strengthening marriage relationships?

Sex is one of the gifts that God has given to men and women. God

designed it for giving us children, and for joy, closeness, and unity between one man and one woman in holy marriage (Genesis 1:27, 28; 1 Corinthians 7:2). When sex is taken away from these God-given purposes, the gift of sex becomes sin. This sin often has terrible results (read 1 Corinthians 6:18, 19). God alone knows the terrible results that sexual impurity has brought to the human family.

Sex is a very strong drive, and that makes it easy to abuse. It easily can get out of control. Once it is out of control, it is very difficult to get under control again. Worse, the more a person gives in to it, the more sex that person needs in order to receive satisfaction.

Prostitution⁷ and adultery⁸ are paths into sexual impurity and addiction (read Proverbs 5:3–14; Proverbs 9:13–18). Today, other kinds of sex addiction are available, too, such as pornography and cybersex.⁹ Internet pornography has created a shocking problem because, with a few clicks of a mouse, it can bring unwholesome and degrading (disrespectful) sex into our homes and offices. These practices can cause addiction, compulsion,¹⁰ and destruction of marriage and family ties. It is impossible to measure the damage that adultery has created in the world.

God is willing to give full pardon and freedom to anyone trapped by sex addictions. Surrender to Him is very

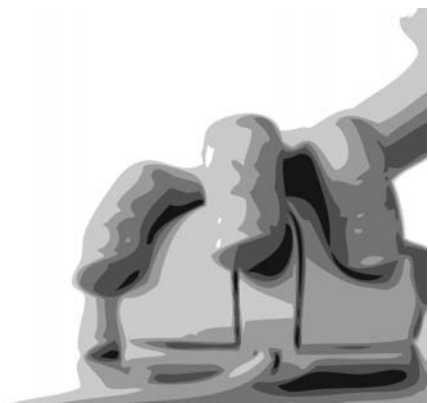
7. prostitution—the act of having sex in exchange for money.

8. adultery—sex outside of marriage.

9. cybersex—activity in which people become sexually excited by sending messages about sex to each other over the Internet.

10. compulsion—a very strong desire to do something.

important (James 4:7). But the addiction may be so strong that the person needs professional help. Support groups that point to God as the best Source of help and have special skills to treat the problem can help.



With a few clicks of a mouse, the Internet can bring unwholesome and degrading sex into our homes and offices.

How can you help someone who wants to experience the forgiveness and healing of God? Suppose you are struggling here. How can you know that all hope is not lost, just as long as you do not lose hope yourself? Jesus forgives and heals.

TUESDAY—MARCH 8

GAMBLING (Matthew 25:15–30)

The Bible does not clearly speak against gambling. But we cannot imagine Jesus or Paul playing at the gambling tables in Las Vegas, can we?

At the same time, Paul does warn against love of money. He calls it the

root of all evil. He also says that the love of money is the reason many people have lost their faith (1 Timothy 6:10). In their desire for wealth, some people have fallen into the gambling trap that Satan uses to destroy them.

How could a person make use of the teachings of Matthew 25:15–30 to help them overcome gambling? Remember that many people who gamble lose lots of money.

In the end, gambling does not pay. The gambling business is successful because a lot more money is lost than won. For example, what are the chances of winning the lottery? The odds are against you. You have a better chance of getting hit by lightning than you do of winning.

Good sense alone should warn us against putting any money and time into gambling. (The gambling industry can succeed only when people lose more than they make.) Still, people gamble. It is usually just for fun at first, but some get hooked on it.

Why? The need for self-esteem¹¹ seems to be the main reason. Many find great satisfaction in dreaming about winning a lot of money. When they do not win, they become hopeful that they will win big next time. So, they gamble again and again. When all their money is spent, they borrow, lie, and sometimes even steal in order to get another “dose” of this nonchemical “drug.”

We may think that gambling addiction does not happen in our church.

11. self-esteem—a feeling of having respect for yourself and your abilities.

But Ellen G. White wrote about it in her time. This is because it was a problem even then. Today, gambling is everywhere. For this reason, we cannot allow ourselves to think that our church members are free from this problem.

Recovery from gambling takes many steps. First, you need to admit that you have a serious problem. Then, you must quit at once and find fellowship in a support group (if available) to avoid falling back into gambling. Be alert and stay away from any temptation¹² that may encourage you to gamble. Strengthening your self-esteem can help keep you from falling back into the old habit. Daily Bible study, prayer to God, and holding on to His promises of healing are important when you are struggling with any temptation.

What would you say and do if someone you know said to you, “I am hooked on gambling, and I just cannot quit”? What Bible promises could you point them to? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 1 Peter 4:1, 2.



Paul warns that the love of money is the root of all evil.

12. temptation—something that causes a strong urge or desire to have or do something, especially something that is bad, wrong, or unwise.

13. covetousness—a feeling or a very strong desire for something that you do not have, and especially for something that belongs to someone else.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 9

THE LOVE OF MONEY (Proverbs 30:8, 9)

The Bible does not limit the amount of money a person should have. But the Bible does warn against the wrong attitudes (thoughts or feelings) toward money and the things we own—attitudes such as covetousness¹³ and greed. The wrong outlook can cause people to become hooked on making money or on owning property. Doing these things may take so much time and effort that they become false gods.

Information from TV and computers has made things easier. But, at the same time, it has made things more dangerous for those who are easily addicted. For example, private investors on the stock exchange now can do their work over the Internet. In this way, some easily are caught up for hours in front of the computer, trying to make money. This is not the same thing as someone who tries to invest money wisely and carefully.

What warning do Mark 10:17–27; 1 Timothy 6:10; and Luke 12:15 give?

Words such as “the man’s face fell” and “he went away sad” (Mark 10:22, NIV) tell us that the love this man had for riches was greater than his love for the Master (Jesus). Having a lot of

money or property is not good or bad in itself. It all depends on where the heart is (Matthew 6:21). It becomes dangerous when you fail to make God, His kingdom, and righteousness (goodness) first in your life.

The ship *Chanunga* was on its way from Liverpool, England, to America. On the way, it crashed with a small vessel from Hamburg, Germany. Crowded with more than two hundred passengers, the ship sank a half hour after the crash. The *Chanunga's* lifesaving boats were lowered in order to reach the shipwrecked people. But only 34 were saved. Why? Almost all had grabbed their belts of gold and silver and tied them around their waists. By refusing to lose their money, the people lost their lives (and their money) instead.

Who does not like money? The question you need to ask yourself is, Do I control my desire for money, or does it control me?

THURSDAY—MARCH 10

PERSONAL IMAGE (1 Peter 3:3, 4)

Read 1 Peter 3:3, 4. What is the difference between what Peter says and what society teaches us?

Society has put a great value on personal image.¹⁴ This is a weakness that humans have suffered from throughout history. Today, beauty and personal care have become big business. The worldwide cosmetics industry

alone counts for more than half of the global food retail market. In addition to cosmetics, many people spend lots of money on body building, facelifts, hair transplants, plastic surgery, special diets, and so on. They do all of this to improve their looks.

This great desire to become more beautiful also can become addictive. Some develop an exercise addiction. Others have the addiction to eat a little less each time, even to the point of endangering their lives.

How would you interpret Matthew 6:19–21 in view of what we are studying? How can the same principles (guidelines) be used?

There is nothing wrong with being fit, clean, and nice looking. But placing too much attention on these things can cause our hearts to make idols (false gods) out of them. Jesus talked about the need to develop treasures in heaven. We should not treasure things on earth that do not last long and lead us away from God's kingdom. Indeed, there is one thing about looks that you can be sure of. Sooner or later, time and gravity will take them away. Time causes skin to wrinkle, and gravity makes skin sag.

Like earthly things, our bodies are a treasure God has entrusted to us. But we run the serious risk of making them idols when we spend too much time and money on them. It is not always easy to know when we cross the line. So, all of us need to be careful about this.

14. personal image—the way other people see you or think about you.

What kind of messages are we creating for our young people in the church about this area? What are we focusing on? In what “hidden” ways might we be sending wrong messages? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—MARCH 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Words and acts testify [show] plainly what is in the heart. Suppose people are too proud, selfish, and vain. Then they will talk all about the fashions, the dress, and the appearance, but not of Christ or the kingdom of heaven. If people are jealous, they will show it in words and acts. There are people who measure themselves by others, do as others do, and make no higher attainments. They excuse themselves because of the faults and wrongs of others. They are really the ones who are feeding on husks instead of real corn and will remain spiritual dwarfs as long as they please Satan by satisfying their own unholy feelings. Some worry about what they shall eat and drink and how they shall be clothed. These thoughts come from a selfish heart, as if worldly things were the most important goal in life. These persons forget the words of Christ: ‘ “But put God’s kingdom first. Do what he [God] wants you to do. Then all of those things will also be given to you” ’ (Matthew 6:33, NlrV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹⁵ for the Church, volume 1, page 500.

15. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.
- ② Why is it so important not to judge those who are struggling with an addiction of any kind? It is easy to judge people, but why should we be very careful about this?
- ③ Some addictions seem to be more socially acceptable than others, which makes them more dangerous. After all, how many people receive treatment for addiction to wealth or power? How can we learn not to let the opinions or values of others influence how we think of these things?
- ④ An addiction might be strong in your life, or in the life of someone you know. But is there anything that the Lord cannot free us from? The answer is No! So then, should we ever surrender to the addiction as if it were impossible for us to be free from it? What is the key to letting Christ work in our lives so that we can have that victory? Read Luke 9:23.
- ⑤ What kind of programs does your local church have that can help people who are struggling with addiction? What can your church do to help those who are in need? In what ways could programs such as these be powerful outreach tools?
- ⑥ What is the Lord’s message to us in 1 Peter 4:1, 2 about what is involved in overcoming sinful addictions?