

Freedom From Addictions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Prov. 23:29–35; 1 Cor. 7:2–5; Matt. 25:15–30; Mark 10:17–27; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4.*

Memory Text: “‘So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ ” (*John 8:36, NIV*).

In recent years, many people have broken free from political tyranny and bondage. But there's another kind of bondage, one that can be just as bad as or worse than its political counterpart—the bondage that comes from being an addict. Alcohol, tobacco, and other substances have enslaved millions. Furthermore, powerful nonchemical addictions are on the rise, too: sex, pornography, gambling (or risky investments), and the accumulation of money/goods.

All addictions create dependence (one feels very uncomfortable until the substance is taken or the act realized) and a certain degree of tolerance (one needs a bit more of it to reach the effect of previous times). Thus, it becomes extremely difficult for addicted people to break away from the cycle that has captured them. For this reason, those trapped need support from family, church, and friends. They also might need professional care and, above all, the power of God working in their lives to give them the freedom that they're promised in Christ the Lord.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 12.*

Alcoholic Beverages

Wine, beer, and other liquor have been associated in the Western world with memorable events, happy occasions, holidays, and important business transactions. There is a seemingly clean and beautiful face to alcoholic beverages. They not only have become socially acceptable but also a “necessity” in certain circumstances. Unfortunately, there’s another side to alcohol that those who make their living selling it don’t want their potential customers to see.

Read Proverbs 23:29–35. What do these verses say about the adverse effects of alcohol? From your own experiences, what have you seen of the devastating effects from the use of this poison?

The image of beautiful wine soon biting like a snake and poisoning like a viper is powerful. Alcohol’s chemical makeup is treated by the human body not as food but as a toxic substance. It is absorbed into the stomach and transported by the bloodstream to the brain, lungs, kidneys, and heart in just a few minutes. The liver especially is taxed in order to process a substance that takes hours of hard work to break down. When the presence of alcohol is chronic and prolonged significantly, the organs deteriorate, and the person suffers from one or more illnesses.

Unfortunately, the effects of alcohol transcend the drinker. Alcohol use comes with a terrible social cost. Half of all automobile and work-place accidents are alcohol-related. Many crimes are committed under the effect of alcohol. Public and private funds are depleted to provide health care to cure maladies caused directly by alcohol. And, closer to home, the spouse and children of the addict often are victims of verbal and physical abuse.

Alcohol, as well as any other psychoactive substance, will affect our ability to make the correct moral choices; under the influence, folk are likely to slip deeper and deeper into sin.

Those trapped in any kind of substance abuse need to realize their problem and their need of help from a power greater than themselves—and that includes God’s grace, the support of family or a caring church community, and the treatment prescribed by qualified professionals (if possible).

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

Sex Addiction

What does the Bible say about sex as a source of enjoyment and strengthening marriage relationships? *Prov. 5:18, 19; 1 Cor. 7:2–5.*

Sex is one of the many enjoyable gifts that God has granted to men and women. God designed it not only for procreation but also to be a source of joy, closeness, and unity—but only in the context of marriage between one man and one woman (*Gen. 1:27, 28; 1 Cor. 7:2*). When taken away from this God-ordained framework and purpose, the gift becomes sin—sin often with devastating consequences (*see 1 Cor. 6:18, 19*). God alone knows the extent of havoc that sexual immorality has brought to the human family.

Sex is a very strong drive and thus readily open to abuse. It easily can become an absorbing obsession, one that's very difficult to control. Worse, the more one indulges in it, the more and more sex one needs in order to reach the level of satisfaction attained earlier.

Prostitution and adultery are traditional paths into sexual immorality and addiction (*see Prov. 5:3–14, 9:13–18*). In addition, other forms of sex addiction are available today, such as pornography and cybersex. Internet pornography has created a staggering problem because, with a few mere clicks of a mouse, it can put the most vile and degrading acts into our homes and offices. These practices are highly capable of creating addiction, compulsion, and deterioration of marriage and family ties. It's impossible to calculate the damage, for instance, that adultery has created in the world.

Sexual immorality is easy to start, and those who have not fallen into its trap will do well in keeping far from it. How crucial that when confronted with sexual temptations outside the sacred bonds of marriage, each person should act as Joseph did (*see Gen. 39:7–12*).

God is willing to grant full pardon and freedom to anyone trapped in sex addictions. Submission to Him is crucial (*James 4:7*). But the addiction mechanism is so intricate that professional help may be needed. Support groups that incorporate God as the ultimate Source of help and include specialized skills to treat the problem can be of great benefit, if available.

How can you help someone who, though guilty of sin in this area, is seeking to know God's forgiveness and healing? Suppose you are struggling here. How can you know that all hope is not lost, just as long as you don't lose hope yourself? Jesus forgives—and heals.

Gambling

Though the Bible doesn't come right out and prohibit gambling per se, it's hard to imagine Jesus or Paul working the tables in Las Vegas, isn't it?

At the same time, Paul does warn against love of money, classing it as the root of all evil and the reason people have abandoned the faith (*1 Tim. 6:10*). For some, in their desire for wealth, gambling becomes the snare that Satan uses to seek to destroy them.

Read Matthew 25:15–30. How could one apply the teaching here to the problem of gambling, especially when the vast majority of people who gamble lose?

Gambling is for losers. The industry thrives because a lot more money is lost than won. What, for instance, are the chances of winning the lottery? The odds are staggeringly against you. You have more chance of getting hit by lightning than you do of winning.

Logic alone should warn us against putting any money and time into gambling (after all, the gambling industry can exist only when people lose more than they make). Yet, people gamble, and soon what they thought of as fun later becomes a compulsion.

Why? Self-esteem needs seem to be at the core. Many find a special satisfaction in fantasizing about winning. When they do not win, they become increasingly hopeful about hitting it next time. So, they gamble again and again. When all money is spent, they borrow, lie, and may steal in order to get another “dose” of this nonchemical “drug.”

We may think that gambling addiction does not happen in our church, but Ellen White wrote about it in her time, for it was a problem even then. There is no reason to believe that today (when gambling is ubiquitous) our church members are free from this problem, especially as online gambling can bring the casino right into our homes.

Recovery from gambling takes a multiple front: First is to admit that you have a serious problem. Then you must quit at once but find refuge in a group (if available) in order to avoid relapse. Be alert and stay away from any stimulus that may entice you to gamble. Enhancing self-esteem also is necessary to avoid relapse. Most important, constant communion with God and clinging to His promises of healing is crucial when 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? See 1 Cor. 10:13 and 1 Pet. 4:1, 2.

The Love of Money

“Put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; [provide me only with the food I need;] lest, being full, I deny you, saying, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or, being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God” (*Prov. 30:8, 9, NAB*).

The Bible does not limit the amount of money one should aim to have but warns against the wrong attitude toward money and possessions—such as covetousness and greed. A wrong outlook might make people obsessive, compulsive, and addicted to moneymaking (albeit honestly earned) or to the accumulation of possessions. These themes may occupy so much time and effort that they become false gods.

Information technology has made things easier, but, at the same time, more risky for those prone to addiction. For example, private investors on the stock exchange now can perform their operations instantly over the Internet. In this setting, some easily are caught for endless hours in front of the computer, all in order to make money; this is not the same thing, however, as someone being a good steward by wisely and carefully investing money.

Read Mark 10:17–27. See also 1 Tim. 6:10 and Luke 12:15. **What warning must we take away from these texts?**

Such expressions as “the man’s face fell” and “he went away sad” (*Mark 10:22, NIV*) tell us that his love for wealth was greater than his love for the Master. Accumulation of money or material possessions is not good or bad in itself. It all depends on where the heart is (*see Matt. 6:21*). It becomes dangerous when it stands in the way of what should be the first goal: seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness (*vs. 33*).

The ship *Chanunga*, on its way from Liverpool to America, had a massive collision with a small vessel from Hamburg. 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 persons, but only thirty-four were saved. Why such a small proportion? Almost all had seized their belts of gold and silver and tied them round their waists. Refusing to lose their money, they lost their lives (and their money) instead.

Who doesn’t like money? The question you need to ask yourself is, “Do I control my desire for money, or does it control me?”

Personal Image

Read 1 Peter 3:3, 4. How different is what's said there from what society teaches us?

Society has placed an excessive value on personal image. This is a weakness that has accompanied humans for their entire history. In our days, this emphasis on beauty and personal care has reached overwhelming proportions. The worldwide cosmetic industry alone is more than half of the global food retail market. In addition to cosmetics, many people spend endless resources on body building, facelifts, hair transplants, plastic surgery, special diets, and so on, all in order to improve their appearance.

This intensive desire to become more beautiful also has the risk of becoming addictive. Some develop exercise addiction; others the addiction to eat a little less each time, to the point of endangering their lives. Others may become obsessed with their hair or skin, submitting themselves to sophisticated, costly, and never-ending treatments.

How would you interpret Matthew 6:19–21 in the context we are looking at? How do the same principles apply?

There is nothing wrong with being fit, clean, and nice-looking. It is the constant focus on these things that can draw our hearts to them to the point of letting them become idols. Jesus talked about the need to develop treasures in heaven, not on earth, where things do not last and may distract us from God's kingdom. Indeed, there's one thing about looks that you can be sure of: sooner or later, time and gravity will take them away.

Like material resources, our bodies are a treasure entrusted to us, but we run a serious risk to make it an idol when our devotion to it becomes excessive. It's not always easy to know when a line has been crossed; hence, the need for all of us to be careful in this regard.

What kind of messages are we creating for our young people in the church in regard to personal image? What are we emphasizing? In what subtle ways might we be sending wrong messages? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

Further Study: “Words and acts testify plainly what is in the heart. If vanity and pride, love of self and love of dress, fill the heart, the conversation will be upon the fashions, the dress, and the appearance, but not on Christ or the kingdom of heaven. If envious feelings dwell in the heart, they will be manifested in words and acts. Those who measure themselves by others, do as others do, and make no higher attainments, excusing themselves because of the faults and wrongs of others, are feeding on husks and will remain spiritual dwarfs as long as they gratify Satan by thus indulging their own unconsecrated feelings. Some dwell upon what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed. These thoughts flow out from the abundance of the heart, as though temporal things were the grand aim in life, the highest attainment. These persons forget the words of Christ: “ ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 500.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s final question.
- 2 Why is it so important not to be judgmental toward those who are struggling with an addiction of any kind? It’s easy to be judgmental, of course, but why should we be very careful in that regard?
- 3 Some addictions are deemed more socially acceptable than others, which could only add to their deception. After all, how many people enter treatment for addiction to wealth or power? How can we learn not to let societal values impact how we view these things?
- 4 However strong the grip of addiction could be in your life or in the life of someone you know, is there anything that the Lord can’t free us from? What is the key to allowing Christ to work in our lives so that we can have that victory? *See 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, as well?
- 6 Read 1 Peter 4:1, 2. What is the Lord’s message to us here in regard to what is involved in overcoming sinful addictions?

Alive Again: Part 2

by ATTE HELMINEN

Pirkko was depressed and discouraged. Things weren't going well in her life. She felt as if she was in a pit from which she couldn't escape. One day she met an old friend, Jari, who is the local church elder in Salo, Finland. They chatted for awhile, and he gave her some books to help her deal with her depression. She was deeply impressed with the books, so Jari gave her some videos and invited her to visit the church.

When Pirkko walked into the small church hall and saw the people, she thought, I don't belong here! I'm so different! But the members welcomed and loved her. She felt the Holy Spirit's presence, and she felt at home.

Pirkko's lifestyle still bothered her, but the church members' love made it easy for her to return. Pirkko invited her daughters to attend church with her, and they came. In time Pirkko and her daughters embraced Christ and were baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "I have a long way to go," Pirkko says. "But God is leading in my life."

Marko was a self-proclaimed atheist. "Science was my religion, and scientists were my gods," he said. One day he met Pirkko's daughter, and the two chatted for some time. Then she invited him to church. He went just to be polite.

He was impressed with the love people showered on him. He continued attending and realized that he felt good being there. His doubts over God's existence faded as God's love flowed through the lives of the church members. He asked to be baptized.

When he invited his family to his baptism, they were surprised, for he had often spoken against God. But several of them came and saw the difference that Jesus was making in his life. Marko shares his new faith with his family, and several have come to church with him.

"I thank God that I have found Him," Marko says. "I know that if the believers in this church hadn't been so loving, I would still be an unbeliever. It took the fire of love to melt my heart."

The church in Salo is alive once more. It's been reborn, the result of prayerful changes in the lives of its members. It is, essentially, a church replant, and as such needs financial support to carry on its ministries in the community while it grows. Our mission offerings can help the members revitalize and re-grow their church.

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