

BREAKING STUBBORN HABITS

Ken Taylor
Creskide Church
December 2017

If I can make one point in this, I hope it's that addictions can't be overcome until we admit the dragon has overpowered us and we turn to God and others for help. There is neither help nor hope for people who deny the seriousness of their problem."

Bill Perkins in, Fatal Attractions: You Can Break Free From Secret Addictions

STEP ONE: RECOGNIZE

It is sadly true that many people are trapped in a stubborn habit or an addiction and fail to recognize it. We are easily deceived. Remember that according to James 1:14, deception is the first step in sinning. That does not lower our culpability but it does call us to be careful that we do not deny the possibility that we might be living in some dimension of deception right now. Deception may evidence itself in our denying we are doing any wrong or our belief that we can "quit it at any time." To help counter this tendency . . .

1. Read the Bible. The Bible is a book that calls us to holy living. By reading it God can, through the person of the Holy Spirit, identify an area or areas in our lives that need changing. Read the Bible asking God to open its truths to you. Read the Bible asking God to point out any areas that need changing.

2. Talk to a friend. Everyone needs a friend or friends who are so committed they are willing to run the risk of telling us the truth about ourselves. Ask if there are any areas in your life that as they have observed it are habitually wrong. Ask where you need to change.

3. Pray. Ask God to open your eyes so that you might see yourself as he sees you. Ask him to show you how deeply he loves you. Ask him to show you where change needs to take place in your life. Ask him to help you.

4. Do a self-test. Take the following list and check it off. Are there any areas or is there an area where you are being controlled by the dragon within? Are you in control? Is there any sense of personal shame associated with an activity on this list?

AM I BEING CONTROLLED BY?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> pornography | <input type="checkbox"/> exercise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> anger | <input type="checkbox"/> food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> workaholism | <input type="checkbox"/> lust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> negativism | <input type="checkbox"/> sex |
| <input type="checkbox"/> drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> alcoholism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> smoking | <input type="checkbox"/> swearing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> codependency | <input type="checkbox"/> spending |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gambling | <input type="checkbox"/> television |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ | |

STEP TWO: REPENT

One must not only be willing to recognize or identify an addiction or stubborn habit but must also be passionate about turning away from that pattern of life. This is a critical point in the process of defeating the dragon within. We do what we do because we like it. No one makes us begin or keep an addiction. We choose to follow this pattern.

This REPENT step calls on us to change our mind and consequently our direction as it relates to this pattern of life that has such control over us. How passionate are you about change? Do you hate what it is you are doing? What you think about the pattern you are in is essential to moving out of its grip.

Do some thinking about it. Look at the negative side first. Take the time to consider the consequences of this behaviour should you continue in it. You might want to write down what has already happened in these areas and what is the worst-case scenario should you fail to arrest this pattern in your life.

Consequences of my addiction . . .

1. To my family . . .
2. To my employment . . .
3. To my health . . .
4. To my reputation . . .

5. To my self-image . . .
6. To my finances . . .
7. To my future . . .
8. To my God . . .

On the other hand, it is often good to identify those areas of your life in which you will benefit should the addiction cease. We'll call this list the benefits list.

Benefits of abstinence . . .

1. To my family . . .
2. To my employment . . .
3. To my health . . .
4. To my reputation . . .
5. To my self-image . . .
6. To my finances . . .
7. To my future . . .
8. To my God . . .

Take the time to write as much as you can down for both lists. Take a few days' time to do this. It will amaze you how destructive on the one hand this addiction can be to you and how beneficial breaking free of it can be.

We will only stop our addictive behaviour when at least one of two things is true.

1. We believe that the pain of quitting will be less than the pain of staying in the addiction. When the physical and emotional pain of continuing our addictive behaviour reaches disastrous proportions then we will really want to quit. The loss of family members, our health, loss of employment, shame, etc. can all be contributing factors.

2. When we see that the rewards of abstinence are greater than the pleasures of the addiction. When I was a kid, I wanted to learn to ride a bike. I skinned my knees and my knuckles and ran into things like posts and cars and walls all because I wanted so badly to learn to ride that thing. The rewards of being able to ride out-weighed the pain I had to experience to learn. I was willing to pay the price. The same thing is true of addictions.

STEP THREE:
REACH OUT

It is imperative that we realize that we cannot pull this one off on our own. I am convinced that if we cannot go to another person and ask for help then it is probably true that we have not fully embraced STEP TWO: REPENT. The Bible tells us that we must confess our faults to one another (James 5:16) if we truly want to experience healing.

All of us need the spiritual and emotional support of a friend.

Some of us may need the professional help of a counsellor. Many addictions gain an even tighter grip on our lives because they are chemically enhanced. Those enhancements can be externally introduced or the activity itself can trigger our body to release endorphins, adrenaline, etc. that provide great pleasure and may contribute to the grip that habit may have on our lives. If that is the case, you may need medication to help you overcome that dependency. You must get help for that.

God is there to help you. God specializes in touching the lives of people and freeing them from the wrong patterns of thinking and living that have entrenched their lives. Jesus himself said that he came to set captives free. Certainly, that freedom has a lot to do with the addictions we can easily find ourselves in.

Don't fight the addiction on your own. Get medical help if that is necessary. Be certain to open up to a friend or two and have them hold you accountable. Remember that even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.

And check out **Celebrate Recovery**. We believe that this Ministry at Creekside is a wonderful tool that will provide significant ongoing help and resources to better enable you to break free.

STEP FOUR:
RESPOND

When the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez landed at Veracruz, Mexico, in 1519, he was intent on conquest. To ensure the devotion of his men, Cortez set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. With no means of retreat Cortez' army had only one direction to move . . . into the interior of Mexico. Cortez understood the price of commitment and he paid it.

Winning over an addiction is not easy. You must be absolutely committed to the task. The key is to have already made the decision and to not go back and ask the question again.

Write out your decision and sign it as a kind of vow. Place the signed vow in a prominent place to remind you of your decision.

Journal on a regular basis. Write out your experiences with winning over the addiction. Write out your daily struggles. Thank God for the victories you have already experienced.

Again, once you have told a friend about this stubborn habit or addiction, the friend can become a source of support and accountability that can encourage you to break free.

STEP FIVE:
REPLACE

Be certain to identify activities that will be appropriate to replace the habit/addiction. If you don't you are setting yourself up to fall back into it again.

Identify, if possible, any patterns that surround your practise of the habit/addiction.

1. When does it happen most frequently?
2. Where am I when it happens?
3. What am I feeling emotionally at the time?
4. What am I thinking about just prior to satisfying the habit/addiction?
5. How am I feeling physically at the time?

Identify an activity or activities that you might engage in that would effectively counter any patterns you have identified. You want to, if appropriate, change geographic location if that is a contributing factor. You want to, if appropriate, change what it is you are thinking about at the time. Replace is an important step.

You are likely going to have to change more than the activity itself. We don't do things in isolation. Changing a stubborn habit involves more change than just the habit itself.

Remember too that God longs to come into our lives to fill us with his presence. Revelation 3:20 tells us that Jesus stands at the door of our hearts longing to come in and have fellowship. Having him in the right place in our lives will eliminate the temptation to yield to the addiction. Learn to walk with God. Learn to pray without ceasing. Learn to live in the presence of Jesus.

STEP SIX:
REPEAT

You were never perfect. You are not perfect. You will never be perfect. It is not the fact that you fall that is the issue. It is whether or not you get up again. With all the support around you of friends and of God remember that there is this big cheering section that is trying to help you cross the finish line.

If you do fall quickly get back up again. Ask yourself why the fall. Often, we learn more in failure than in success. Perhaps there are some lessons you can learn for the next time. Be even more resolved to not do it again. You got this far. Certainly, you can go even further the next time.

Keep a calendar and mark it daily as you make it through another day without falling.

Remember, "Inch by inch it's a cinch. Yard by yard it's very hard." Take small steps.

STEP SEVEN:
REMEMBER

Remember that no matter what happens to you God extends his arms of love. Romans 5:8 tells us that he loves us even when we sinned against him. Nothing can change the extension of God's love to you. The story of the Prodigal Son is the story of every one of us. In Luke 15 we read that the Father's arms are always open to receive us again. If you have no other motive, why not allow the love of God to draw you out of your habit/pattern of behaviour/addiction?