



HOPE FOR THE ADDICTED



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Published in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

I was born in Melbourne, Australia without arms and legs even though three sonograms had never revealed any complications. Growing up, it wasn't easy. Throughout my childhood, I struggled with depression and loneliness. I even questioned the purpose of my life and tried to take my own life when I was ten years old.

But Jesus met me in my pain and I decided to give my life to him. Since then, I've travelled to 74 countries to share my story with millions of people just like yourself, from students and young people to business professionals and even world leaders. I want to share a special message with the world based on my own story and encounter with Jesus: there is hope.

I may not know what you're struggling with today. But like I've seen in my own life, the Bible teaches us that Jesus is not only present in our pain, but that He is the answer to our heaviest struggles. Jesus says, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).

I'm here to tell you today that you are special, you are loved, and that God does have an amazing plan for your life. He will never leave or forsake you. And if God can use me, a man without arms and legs, to be His hands and feet, then He will certainly use any willing heart. Throughout my life I've always held onto a special verse that says: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a **future**"* (Jeremiah 29:11). If we give our lives to him, he promises to give us hope and a future. Now that is amazing!

Here at NickV Ministries, we love you and we're praying for you. We're here to be your Champions and to point you back to the true Champion: Jesus. We pray that these resources will help you through whatever challenges you may be facing and bring hope for the way forward.

Thank you and God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "NickV". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nick Vujicic and the NickV Ministries Team

HABITS & ADDICTIONS

Success in Self-Control

What Is God's Heart on Habits and Addictions?

Habits are learned patterns of behavior or attitudes repeated so often they become typical of a person. Addictions are a compulsive, enslaving dependence on something, resulting in detrimental patterns of thinking and behaving. You can control a habit, but with an addiction—whether it's drugs, alcohol, pornography, shopping, gambling, or something else—it controls you.

The Lord encourages you to “*give careful thought to your ways*” (Haggai 1:5). This simple command is an invitation to examine your attitudes and behaviors to see what is positive and negative, what is healthy and what is harmful. As you examine your own life and look to God's Word for guidance, remember . . . the Lord can help you break any enslaving addiction and empower you to develop positive, healthy habits.

*“For I am the LORD your God
who takes hold of your right hand and says to you,
Do not fear; I will help you.”
(ISAIAH 41:13)*

Habits can be beneficial and profitable.

“Blessed are those who keep my ways” (PROVERBS 8:32).

Habits can be evil and destructive.

“They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to” (1 TIMOTHY 5:13).

Habits can be passed down from generation to generation.

“The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the ways of his father David before him” (2 CHRONICLES 17:3).

Habits can reflect devotion to God and God's character.

“I have kept the ways of the LORD; I am not guilty of turning from my God” (PSALM 18:21).

Habits can increase consistency and strengthen character.

“The righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger” (JOB 17:9).

Habits are a choice—a function of the will—but they can also be influenced by the mind and emotions.

“What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways” (JOB 22:28).

Habits can be a positive witness to others.

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”
(MATTHEW 5:16).

Addictions are not just a choice, but the result of a bad choice that has been repeatedly made over an extended period of time.

“They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for ‘people are slaves to whatever has mastered them’” (2 PETER 2:19).

Addictions lead hearts astray and hurt the cause of Christ.

“Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute” (2 PETER 2:2).

Addictions hold people captive and cover them with a canopy of darkness.

“I will keep you and will make you . . . to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (ISAIAH 42:6–7).

Addictions enslave people, but freedom comes from the Lord who delights in breaking the yoke of slavery.

“They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them” (EZEKIEL 34:27).

Addictions hold mastery over us, but God is to be our only Master.

“I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:12).

Positive habits can be developed and addictions overcome through Christ.

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one [Jesus] who is in you is greater than the one [Satan] who is in the world” (1 JOHN 4:4).

The Addictive Habits Checklist

How do you know if you have a destructive habit or a hidden addiction controlling you?

Be accountable before God and take an honest look at your thoughts and actions. Ask yourself whether you have any habits or desires that would cause you to answer *Yes* to the following questions:

Y / N Are my thoughts consumed with it?

Y / N Is my time scheduled around it?

Y / N Could my health be harmed by it?

Y / N Does my guilt increase because of it?

Y / N Are my finances affected by it?

Y / N Am I defensive when asked about it?

- Y / N Are my relationships hurt by it?
- Y / N Am I upset when I can't do it?
- Y / N Is my spiritual growth hindered by it?
- Y / N Have I been asked to stop it?
- Y / N Would I discourage my children from doing it?
- Y / N Do I hide it from others?
- Y / N Would Jesus avoid doing it?
- Y / N Could my witness for Christ be diminished because of it?

Let David's prayer be your own personal prayer:

*"Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."*

(PSALM 139:23–24)

What Causes the Cycle of Addiction?

The Cycle of Addiction

Past Pain: You are motivated to find a way to ease the continual hurt of past experiences.

—“I can no longer cope with what happened in my past unless I find something to ease the pain.”

“Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief” (PROVERBS 14:13).

Mood-altering activity: You attempt to temporarily relieve emotional or psychological pain.

—“I hate the way I feel and the tormenting thoughts I have—I must escape them if only temporarily.”

“How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?” (PSALM 13:2).

Addiction: You participate in unbridled mood-altering activities on a regular basis.

—“I feel compelled to keep increasing my participation to better mask the pain I feel.”

“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!” (ROMANS 6:20–21).

Violating values: You disregard your own convictions by engaging in mood-altering addictive behaviors.

—“I will do whatever I have to do in order to attain this feeling—I must have it!”

“I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway” (ROMANS 7:19 NLT).

Guilt: You feel conscience-struck for having wrong attitudes and committing wrong actions.

—“I realize I have been wrong and have committed wrongful acts.”

“My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear” (PSALM 38:4).

Shame: You believe you are a bad person who is without worth or hope because of your addictions.

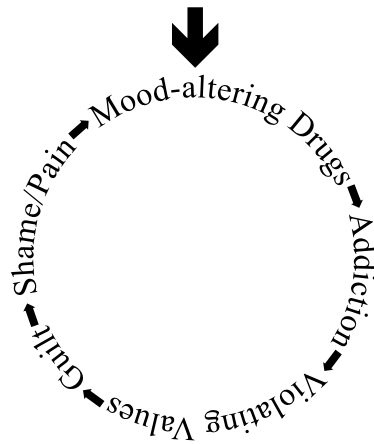
—“I know I have no value and there is nothing good in me, only bad.”

“I live in disgrace all day long, and my face is covered with shame . . .” (PSALM 44:15).

Present Pain: You are motivated to find a way to ease the continual pain produced by the shame that accompanies addictive behaviors.

—“I hate living with this painful shame. I must do something—anything—to feel better.” And the cycle is complete—only to be repeated again and again and again.

Past/Present Pain



Once an addictive behavior is developed, the cycle that accompanies it becomes established and is common among all who engage in addictive behaviors. The “antidote to past pain” (the addiction) produces present pain and then becomes the antidote to the present pain as well. This cycle keeps going around and around until past and present pain become so convoluted they seem inseparable and indistinguishable from one another. It’s a vicious cycle that ensnares and enslaves, but it’s a cycle that *can* be broken!

*“We have escaped like a bird from the fowler’s snare;
the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.*

*Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.”*

(PSALM 124:7–8)

Steps to Self-Control

Start with a commitment to truth, admitting what habit God wants you to change.

- Believe: God wants only what is best for you.
- Believe: God has the desire and power to help you.
- Believe: God doesn't punish you, but disciplines you.
- Believe: God is faithful, perfect, good, and just.

Personalize: *"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he"* (DEUTERONOMY 32:4).

Separate yourself from your sinful habit, writing out what it's costing you.

- Repent (change your thinking) and confess your habit as sinful.
- Realize that yielding to your habit makes you a slave to sin.
- Review the negative consequences of your habit regularly.
- Read and memorize Psalm 1.

Personalize: *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (Romans 6:1–2).

Set a new goal, picturing yourself establishing the new habit.

- Make it your goal to be empowered by God.
- Make it your goal to please God.
- Make it your goal to depend on God.
- Make it your goal to do the will of God.

Personalize: *"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"* (2 CORINTHIANS 5:9–10).

Stand on the truth, setting a time to begin.

- Know: In Christ you are set free from the penalty of sin.
- Know: In Christ you are set free from the power of sin.
- Know: In Christ you are "dead to sin."
- Know: In Christ you no longer have to be a slave to sin.

Read Romans chapters 6, 7, and 8. Write down every verse in which Paul mentions your freedom from sin.

Personalize: *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin . . ."* (ROMANS 6:6).

Substitute your thoughts with God's thoughts, identifying your weak points.

– When you are tempted by a habit, remember:

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 CORINTHIANS 10:13).

– When you think you are powerless over a habit, say:

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (ISAIAH 40:29).

– When you think you've had the habit too long to change, claim:

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

– When you begin to rationalize that the habit is okay, admit:

“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 PETER 4:1–2).

– When you think no one will know about the habit, remind yourself of this truth:

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (HEBREWS 4:13).

– When you have given in to a habit, remember:

“The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down” (PSALM 145:14).

Personalize: *“In view of God's mercy . . . offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (ROMANS 12:1–2).*

Surrender your will to God and seek out an accountability partner.

– Acknowledge that you belong to God.

– Acknowledge that God has authority over all your thoughts, words, desires, time, money, actions, relationships, and possessions.

– Acknowledge that the decision to change is yours. You are making a choice!

– Acknowledge that you have the actual presence of God's Spirit in you to help you make the right choice!

Personalize: *“Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness” (ROMANS 6:19).*

Stay on track, practicing your new habit daily for three months.

– Avoid taking pride in gaining victory over your habit.

– Avoid thinking you have control over what caused your habit.

– Avoid thinking it will be okay to occasionally indulge the habit.

– Avoid moving out from under God's grace into self-sufficiency.

Personalize: *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:10).*

ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE

Breaking Free & Staying Free

What Is God's Heart on Substance Abuse?

While our physical bodies are temporal, vulnerable to disease and ultimately will decay and return to dust, they are also the centerpiece of God's creation. We are made in His image and designed to house His very Spirit and reflect His character to the whole of His creation. God's final plan for us is that we become like Him . . . that we *"be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters"* (ROMANS 8:29).

With God's ultimate goal for us in mind, His heart on alcohol and drug addiction and any other addiction becomes abundantly clear. Rather than allowing any substance to control our thoughts and actions, it is God's desire that we submit our wills, surrender our lives, and present our bodies to Him, to His Lordship, to His leadership, to His rule. To be under the control of anyone or anything other than our Creator God is to be in bondage to the enemy of God.

*"Be alert and of sober mind.
Your enemy the devil prowls around
like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour."
(1 PETER 5:8)*

God's heart is that we surrender our bodies to Christ, not to an addiction.

"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (ROMANS 12:1).

God's heart is that we allow Him to transform us through the renewing of our minds.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (ROMANS 12:2).

God's heart is that we not allow anything to replace Him in our lives and rule over us as gods.

"You shall have no other gods before me" (EXODUS 20:3).

God's heart is that we cultivate an intimate personal relationship with Him as our provider.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . . God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (2 PETER 1:3; PHILIPPIANS 4:19).

"Rather than allowing any substance to control our thoughts and actions, it is God's desire that we submit our wills, surrender our lives, and present our bodies to Him."

God's heart is that we develop grace-empowered control in every area of our lives.

"The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (TITUS 2:11–12).

God's heart is that we glorify Him in all that we think, say, and do.

"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 CORINTHIANS 10:31).

God's heart is that we not lose heart when we relapse, but that we confess our sin of misplaced dependence and thank Him for His forgiveness.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 JOHN 1:9).

God's heart is that we choose our friends and associates wisely because of the influence they have on us.

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night" (PSALM 1:1–2).

God's heart is that we not dwell on our faults and failures, but rather that we focus on the work God is doing in us now and the wonderful plans He has for us in the future.

"'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' . . . See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (JEREMIAH 29:11; ISAIAH 43:19).

God's heart is that we overcome anything that keeps us in bondage, and that we live in the victory accomplished when Jesus overcame the world for us.

"Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 JOHN 5:4–5).

How to Find Freedom from Addiction

Just as substance or behavioral dependencies and addiction don't develop overnight, freedom from any dependency is rarely immediate. Although God absolutely has the power to instantly heal and deliver a struggler at any time and in any way He so chooses, that is not what usually happens. Often, a sequence of events leads people into bondage and another sequence leads people into freedom.

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."
(GALATIANS 5:1)*

12 Steps to Freedom

At the moment of your salvation, you were delivered from the *penalty of sin* (eternal death), and you can be delivered from the *power of sin* (destructive addictions). But you must realize that freedom from the power of dependency is a *process* that requires focused, active participation on your part. You must choose to believe and practice the truth about yourself and God.

To do that, you will need to . . .

1. Admit you are powerless over your dependency.

“I am unable to manage my life—I cannot control my life.”

- *Accept* your dependent condition and your vulnerability to addiction.
- *Acknowledge* your inability to manage your life and to overcome your dependency through God’s mighty power.
- *Articulate* to God your total inadequacy and your deepest need of His power in your life.

“Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:9).

2. Realize that the God who made you and saved you has the power to restore you.

“I am asking Christ to restore every area of my life.”

- *Accept* the Lordship of Christ Jesus in your life as your master, ruler, and owner.
- *Acknowledge* your need for God to restore you to wholeness.
- *Articulate* your gratitude to God for the restoration He will bring to your mind, will, and emotions. Thank Him for what He plans to do in and through your life.

“Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once more” (PSALM 71:20–21).

3. Yield your will to the will of God.

“I am asking Christ to take control of my life.”

- *Accept* the fact that your sinful nature died on the cross with Christ and that sin (your addiction) is to no longer rule your life.
- *Acknowledge* the devastation that has resulted from your past choices and actions.
- *Articulate* your determination to stop destructive patterns by yielding your will to the Lord.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (PROVERBS 3:5–6).

4. Face reality—face your true self.

“I will take an honest look at my life and ask God to reveal to me my sins and character flaws.”

- *Accept* the truth that in the past you have deceived yourself about your dependency.
- *Acknowledge* your previous reluctance to face the truth about wrong choices and patterns.
- *Articulate* to God and to others your willingness to know the truth about yourself and your commitment to honestly evaluate your life, your strengths, and your weaknesses.

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (PSALM 139:23–24).

5. Admit your struggle with sin, both to God and to someone else.

“I will see my sin as God sees it and hate my sin as God hates it.”

- *Accept* the depth and the duration of your struggle with addiction.
- *Acknowledge* to a supportive person the power that your dependency has had over you. Confirm your present commitment to recovery.
- *Articulate* to both God and a friend your desire to overcome your dependency and to live in victory.

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen” (JAMES 5:16 NCV).

6. Accept God’s help to change old patterns of the past.

“I will commit my life into the care of Christ.”

- *Accept* your limitations and your need for help.
- *Acknowledge* your inability to effect change on your own.
- *Articulate* to God your helplessness and your desire for Him to change you from the inside out.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 PETER 5:6–7).

7. Confess your defects and daily failings.

“I am willing to see myself as I truly am—broken and in need of a Savior.”

- *Accept* that you are not perfect and that you will fail at times despite your good intentions.
- *Acknowledge* your failures immediately and confess them to God and to those you have offended. Then correct your course.
- *Articulate* any sins and shortcomings to God daily; claim His forgiveness and cleansing.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (PSALM 51:10–12).

8. Ask forgiveness of those you have offended.

“I will find those I’ve hurt and sincerely seek their forgiveness.”

- *Accept* your need to ask forgiveness of anyone you offend, even if you have been offended yourself.
- *Acknowledge* your need for God’s mercy and grace and your resolve to extend mercy and grace to others.
- *Articulate* to God and those you have offended your regret and your resolve to change.

“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (MATTHEW 5:23–24).

9. Make restitution where you have wronged others.

“I will go and make amends where possible with God’s help.”

- *Accept* your obligation to do whatever is within your power to right your wrongs.
- *Acknowledge* to God and to those whom you have wronged your desire to make amends.
- *Articulate* your responsibility to make restitution and your commitment to repay whatever debt you owe (whether repaying money or labor, correcting a lie, showing respect, extending love, etc.).

“If they give back what they took in pledge for a loan, return what they have stolen, follow the decrees that give life, and do no evil—that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the sins that person has committed will be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live” (EZEKIEL 33:15–16).

10. Keep a clean slate when you realize you have been wrong.

“I will take responsibility for my irresponsibility on a daily basis.”

- *Accept* your intent to keep a clean slate before God and others.
- *Acknowledge* when you fail to live as God would have you live.
- *Articulate* your wrongdoings to God, making no excuses, but recommitting to a Spirit-empowered life.

“The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives” (TITUS 2:11–12).

11. Pray to know God’s path for your life.

“I admit that I want to be led by the Lord and to follow His path for me.”

- *Accept* your dependence on God and your need to connect with Him daily through Bible study and prayer.
- *Acknowledge* your need for the prayer support of others.
- *Articulate* to God your desire to be who He wants you to be and to do what He wants you to do.

“Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (PSALM 25:4–5).

12. Reach out to others with your hands and your heart.

“I will care for those who need care and will help with a heart of compassion.”

- *Accept* your need of others and their need of you.
- *Acknowledge* how God has gifted you and His mandate to use your God-given gifts to serve others in tangible, practical ways.
- *Articulate* ways God may be leading you to minister to others. Ask for His confirmation and for guidance from mature Christians who can help you reach out to others.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (GALATIANS 6:2).

The Serenity Prayer

This prayer, created during World War II, has become well-known around the world. Every day, countless people around the globe pray these words. They are looking to God for the grace, courage, and wisdom to walk through each day totally surrendered to the only One who has overcome the world—the very One who enables us to be overcomers in this world.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time,
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace,
taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it.
Trusting that God will make all things right
if I surrender to his will,
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with him forever in the next.
Amen.
—Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)*

Jesus imparts this comforting promise . . .

*“In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
(JOHN 16:33)*

SEXUAL ADDICTION

The Way Out of the Web

What Is God's Heart on Sexual Addiction?

"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4).

Grace—let's begin there. There's grace for you. You're not alone. Help is available.

The apostle Paul wrote those words to a church that had many issues, some of which were sexual sin. As he began his letter, he did not start it with a note of guilt, shame, disappointment, or disgust. He began with gratitude and God's grace.

That's where God begins with you—with grace. The Bible says, *"he gives grace generously"* (James 4:6 NLT).

Maybe you've tried to stop but you can't. Perhaps you had some short-term success, but it happened again. You feel caught in a cycle of guilt and shame and repeating behaviors you don't want to do. You might feel like the apostle Paul, who said, *"I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

If that's you, there's grace for you. Friend, *change is possible*. But the answer is not found in trying harder, beating yourself up, or hiding it and promising to change. It's found in Jesus Christ.

"Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

(ROMANS 7:24–25 NLT)

God loves you and has a heart of grace and compassion for you.

"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (PSALM 145:8–9).

God wants you to regularly remind yourself of who He is.

"O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help" (PSALM 86:5 NLT).

God wants you to see yourself through His eyes.

"You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you" (ISAIAH 43:4 ESV).

God wants you to stay away from all sexual sin.

"God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor" (1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–4 NLT).

God wants you to run and flee from sexual sin.

"Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body" (1 CORINTHIANS 6:18 NLT).

God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:5–6).

God extends complete and total forgiveness to you.

“Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone” (PSALM 32:5 NLT).

God wants you in His presence—to cleanse you of the guilt and shame you feel.

“Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water” (HEBREWS 10:22 NLT).

“There’s grace
for you.
It’s found in
Jesus Christ.”

God wants you to replace the lies you’ve been led to believe with His truth.

“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (PSALM 25:5)

God wants you to find your identity in Him—as His beloved child.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 JOHN 3:1).

God wants you to fight sin—avoiding and getting rid of things that tempt you.

“So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away . . . And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away” (MATTHEW 5:29–30 NLT).

God wants you to seek accountability.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (PROVERBS 27:17).

God can use counselors to help you find victory over sexual addiction.

“For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory” (PROVERBS 24:6 ESV).

God wants you to help others who struggle with sexual addiction.

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (GALATIANS 6:1–2).

Key Verse to Memorize

*“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
(ROMANS 8:1)*

Key Passage to Read

*“God’s will is for you to be holy,
so stay away from all sexual sin.
Then each of you will control his own body
and live in holiness and honor—
not in lustful passion like the pagans
who do not know God and his ways.”*
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:3–5 NLT)

How to Replace Lies with Truth

Underneath much of our sin and struggles are lies we believe about ourselves, about our situation, and about God. The Bible says that we “*suppress the truth*” and that we have “*exchanged the truth of God for a lie*” (Romans 1:18, 25 NASB). These lies are often connected with a sense of guilt and shame. These feelings and the lies we believe can impact our behavior and keep the cycle of addiction going. Therefore, it is important to identify the lies you’ve been led to believe and replace them with God’s truth.

*“Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in your truth.”*
(PSALM 86:11)

Lie: “I am dirty. God is disgusted with me.”

Truth: God loves you. He washes you clean and makes you new by His Spirit.

“Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. ... But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit” (TITUS 3:3–5 NLT).

Lie: “God will never accept me.”

Truth: The Lord chose you, accepts you, and will never reject you. He promises to help you.

“I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:9–10).

Lie: “God won’t forgive me again.”

Truth: God’s grace is greater than our sin. He forgives all our sin.

“O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help” (PSALM 86:5 NLT).

Lie: “I am worthless.”

Truth: You matter to God. You have God-given worth because God created you, and that worth can never be taken from you. You are precious in His sight.

“You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4 NLT).

Lie: “I am unlovable.”

Truth: God loves you, and nothing can separate you from His love.

“Nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ROMANS 8:38–39 NLT).

Lie: “The temptation is too strong.”

Truth: With God’s help, you can overcome temptation. God is faithful to show you a way out.

“The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure” (1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 NLT).

Lie: “I can’t control it.”

Truth: God has given you free will. You do have control over the choices you make, the actions you take, and your responses to people and circumstances.

“For we are each responsible for our own conduct” (GALATIANS 6:5 NLT).

Lie: “I can’t change. There is no hope for me.”

Truth: You can change. No matter how many times you’ve fallen or how deeply ensnared you feel—with God, there is always hope.

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (PROVERBS 23:18).

You may have been led to believe other lies about yourself, your situation, or about God. As an exercise, write them down and then look in God’s Word to discover a passage or a truth that can speak directly to that lie. God wants you to *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Over time, as you replace the lies with God’s truth, you will be transformed by His Word.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*
(ROMANS 12:2)

CODEPENDENCY

The Need to Be Needed

What Is Codependency?

Many people have heard others use the word *codependent*, but they can't really define it. So let's take a look at the background of this word.

Codependent—the word was first used in the 1970s to describe a family member living with someone dependent on alcohol. The prefix *co-* means “with” or “one associated with the action of another.”

Codependent people are dependent on another person to the point of being controlled or manipulated by that person.

Codependency describes the dysfunctional behavior of family members seeking to adapt to the destructive behavior of the alcoholic.

Codependency is a relationship addiction. Just as the alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, the codependent is dependent on *being needed* by the alcoholic or someone who is problematic.

Codependent “enablers” enable addicts or dysfunctional people in their lives to continue with their addictions without marking and maintaining boundaries. Codependency involves being too dependent on someone or something that cannot meet your needs.

Enablers

Question: “How can I know whether I’m an enabler?”

Answer: You are an *enabler* if you perpetuate another’s destructive behavior by protecting that person from painful consequences that could actually serve as a motivation for change.

The *enabling parent* allows the teenager’s drug habit to continue with no repercussions, even to the detriment of other family members.

The *enabling wife* calls her husband’s boss to say he has the flu when in fact he has a hangover.

Ask yourself, *How many lies have I told to protect the reputation of someone with a destructive habit?*

*“An honest witness tells the truth,
but a false witness tells lies.”*

(PROVERBS 12:17)

What Is God's Heart on Codependency?

If you live your life with a *misplaced dependency* on others, you will miss the extraordinary relationship God planned for you to have with Him. To break a pattern of codependent relationships, you need to recognize the lies you believe that perpetuate the pattern and replace them with God's truth so you can live your life in dependence on Him.

*"My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge."
(PSALM 62:7)*

God's Heart on Codependency

Lie: I need people I can trust and depend on to feel good about myself.

Truth: I need to put my trust and confidence completely in the Lord.

"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans" (PSALM 118:8).

Lie: I need the approval of others to feel good about myself.

Truth: I am to desire the approval of God, not men.

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (GALATIANS 1:10).

Lie: I need to change who I am.

Truth: I am a new person in Christ, and He is changing me from the inside out and is making me into the person He created me to be.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17).

Lie: I can expect people to meet all my needs.

Truth: I am to look to God alone to meet my needs.

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (PHILIPPIANS 4:19).

Lie: My thinking does not need to change.

Truth: I am to use God's Word to transform my thinking.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

Lie: I need someone to lead me.

Truth: I must rely on the Lord to lead me.

"He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake" (PSALM 23:3).

"If you live your life with a misplaced dependency on others, you will miss the extraordinary relationship God planned for you to have with Him."

Lie: Everything I need for life and happiness can be found in a relationship with a significant person.

Truth: I have everything I need to live a godly life through my relationship with God alone.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”
(2 PETER 1:3–4).

Lie: My security and safety come from my relationships with others.

Truth: I must depend on God for my security and safety.

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance”
(PSALM 32:7).

Characteristics of a Codependent Person

Codependent people may appear capable and self-sufficient, but in reality they are insecure, self-doubting, and in need of approval. This need for approval often results in an excessive sense of responsibility and a dependence on people-pleasing performances. The Bible, however, says our primary focus should not be on pleasing people, but rather on pleasing God.

*“We instructed you how to live in order to please God,
as in fact you are living.
Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus
to do this more and more.”*
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:1)

Characteristics of a Codependent Person

Consider whether or not any of these statements are reflections of you. Check (✓) everything that applies to you.

- I feel responsible for the feelings, needs, and actions of another person close to me.
- I try to fix the problems of this person even to the detriment of my own well-being.
- I can discern the thoughts, feelings, and needs of this person but cannot identify my own.
- I do things for others that they are capable of doing for themselves.
- I feel angry when my help is not wanted.
- I tend to be rigid and judgmental in the eyes of others.
- I judge myself more harshly than I judge others.
- I deny my own feelings and needs—so I’ve been told.
- I feel guilty when I stand up for myself.
- I feel good about giving but have difficulty receiving.

- I try to be perfect to avoid anger or criticism.
- I look for my worth in the approval of others.
- I find that I am attracted to needy people and needy people are attracted to me.
- I struggle with feeling unloved and look for ways to be needed.
- I throw all my energy into helping someone else.
- I say *No* when I should say *Yes*, and say *Yes* when I should say *No*.
- I feel compelled to take charge of other people's crises.
- I have difficulty setting boundaries with others.
- I rely on the other person in a relationship to make most of the decisions.
- I feel lonely, sad, and empty when I am alone.
- I feel threatened when the person closest to me spends time with someone else.
- I think other people's opinions are more important than my own.
- I refrain from speaking in order to keep peace.
- I fear conflict because the other person could abandon me.
- I become defensive about my relationship with another person.
- I feel "stuck" in a relationship.
- I feel that I have lost my personal identity in order to "fit" into another person's world.
- I feel controlled and manipulated by someone.
- I feel used and taken advantage of by a person close to me.
- I plan my life around another person.
- I prioritize my relationship with another person over my relationship with the Lord.

If you checked five or more of these statements, you may be involved in a codependent relationship.

When we find ourselves in unhealthy patterns of relating, we need to change our focus, change our goals, and change what is hindering us from running the race God has planned for us. Our primary focus should be not on another person but on Jesus.

*"Let us throw off everything that hinders
and the sin that so easily entangles.
And let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us."*

(HEBREWS 12:1)

How to Break Free from Codependency

When you behave in a codependent way, you attempt to meet your needs in an effort to “do it all” or to be another person’s “all-in-all.” However, you can find the road to freedom by *releasing* your desire to control or to change another person.

When you give the Lord control of your life and release to Him the desire to change another person, you can rest in His assurance:

*“My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)

Release

If your heart’s desire is to develop healthy, interdependent relationships, apply the directives of the following acrostic on R-E-L-E-A-S-E.

R-Recognize that you are overly dependent on another person, then choose to place your dependency on God.

- *Admit* that your codependency is a sin.
- *Pray* that God will give you the desire to put Him first and to please Him in all your relationships.
- *Determine* to look to the Lord to meet your needs for love, significance, and security.
- *Realize* that God did not create you to meet all the needs of another person.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (MARK 12:30).

E-Examine your patterns of codependent thinking.

- *Don’t* believe that pleasing people is always Christlike.
- *Don’t* think you should always assume the role of peacemaker.
- *Don’t* fear losing the love of others when you allow them to suffer the consequences of their negative actions.
- *Don’t* say *Yes* when you really believe you should say *No*.

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (ACTS 24:16).

L-Let go of your “super responsible” mindset.

- *Confess* that you are trying to be like God in the life of another person.
- *Trust* God to be actively working in the lives of people in your life.
- *Realize* that you cannot make another person be dependable or responsible.
- *Rest* in God’s sovereign control over all people, events, and circumstances.

“What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (EXODUS 18:17–18).

E-Extend forgiveness to those who have caused you pain.

- *Reflect* on any type of abuse you have experienced in the past—verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual.
- *Answer:* What has been unjust and painful in your life?
- *Answer:* Who do you need to forgive and are you willing to release this person to God?
- *Choose* to forgive again whenever your angry feelings resurface.
“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

Prayer of Forgiveness

*“God, you know the pain that I have experienced in my past.
I don’t want to keep carrying all of this pain for the rest of my life.
I release (list hurts) into your hands,
and I ask you to heal my emotional pain.
Lord, you know what (name of person) has done to hurt me.
As an act of my will, I choose to forgive (name).
I take (name) off of my emotional hook
and put (name) onto your hook.
Thank you, Lord Jesus, for setting me FREE.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

A-Appropriate your identity in Christ.

- *Learn* to live out of your resources in Christ Jesus.
- *Know* the truth: “I can be emotionally set free because Christ lives in me.”
“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (JOHN 8:36).
- *Believe* the truth: “I can change from having my dependency on people to having my dependency on God through the power of Christ in me.”
“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you” (ISAIAH 41:13).
- *Appropriate* the truth: “I will nurture only healthy, godly relationships because I have been given a new nature in Christ.”
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GALATIANS 2:20).

S-Set healthy boundaries.

- *Communicate* the necessity for change.
“I realize I have not been responding to you in a healthy way. I have been far too dependent on you to meet my needs, and I have sought to meet all of your needs. I am committed to having healthy relationships and to putting God first in my life. I know I have had negative responses to you, and I intend to begin responding positively by making decisions based on what is right in the eyes of God.”
- *Establish* what you need to ask forgiveness for.
“I realize I was wrong for ____ (not speaking up when I should have, not being the person I should have been in this relationship). Will you forgive me?”

— *Establish* what your limits of responsibility will be.

“I feel responsible for _____. But I am not responsible for _____ (making you happy, making you feel significant). I want you to be happy, but I don’t have the power to make you happy.”

— *Establish* your limits of involvement.

“I want to do _____ with/for you, but I don’t feel led by God to do _____.”

“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty” (PROVERBS 27:12).

E-Exchange your emotional focus for a spiritual focus.

— *Make* God and your spiritual growth your first priority.

— *Attend* an in-depth Bible study in order to learn the heart of God and to grow spiritually with the people of God.

— *Memorize* sections of Scripture to put God’s Word in your heart and to learn His ways.

— *Redirect* your thoughts to the Lord and take “prayer walks” (talking out loud to the Lord as you walk regularly in your neighborhood or on a trail).

“Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word” (PSALM 119:35–37).

At the very core of codependency is idolatry—that is, giving greater priority to a person than to God himself. God created you and has a perfect plan for your life. He loves you and knows how to fulfill you. If you are in a codependent relationship . . .

Excessive care causes you to compromise your convictions.

Excessive loyalty leaves you without healthy boundaries.

Excessive “love” leads you to say *Yes* when you should say *No*.

God alone has the right to have primary rule in your heart and over your life. Any other substitute is simply idolatry. The Bible says,

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your strength.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 6:5)

Making It All Possible through Christ’s Power

The cure for codependency is rooted in developing an ever-deepening relationship with the Lord. Your increased intimacy with Him will naturally conform you to His character. When the Lord lives inside you, *you can live in His power*. This means that, because Christ was not codependent, you have His power to overcome codependency.

*“In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

(JOHN 16:33)

Releasing You

Releasing is not to stop loving you,
but is to love enough to stop leaning on you.

Releasing is not to stop caring for you,
but is to care enough to stop controlling you.

Releasing is not to turn away from you,
but is to turn to Christ, trusting His control over you.

Releasing is not to harm you,
but is to realize “my help” has been harmful.

Releasing is not to hurt you,
but is to be willing to be hurt for healing.

Releasing is not to judge you,
but is to let the divine Judge judge me.

Releasing is not to restrict you,
but is to restrict my demands of you.

Releasing is not to refuse you,
but is to refuse to keep reality from you.

Releasing is not to cut myself off from you,
but is to prune the unfruitful away from you.

Releasing is not to prove my power over you,
but is to admit I am powerless to change you.

Releasing is not to stop believing in you,
but is to believe the Lord alone will build character in you.

Releasing you is not to condemn the past,
but is to cherish the present and commit our future to God.

—June Hunt

GUILT & SHAME

Breaking Free from Guilt and Shame

What Is God's Heart on Guilt?

God's grace is greater than our guilt. It's one of the most central and remarkable truths of the Bible. For *every* sin and for *all* our sin—God has grace for us. The Bible says, “*he gives us more grace*” (James 4:6).

We all experience guilt. We've all said or done things we shouldn't have, and we've all failed to do things we know we should have done.

Guilt can lead to two very different responses. On one hand, guilt can drive us *away* from God. This often leads us to cover up our sin and guilt, try to ignore it, or we attempt to “earn” God's approval through our “good works” or trying harder or beating ourselves up. This usually leads to feeling more guilt, shame, and frustration.

On the other hand, guilt can drive us *to* God. Guilt can serve as a signal that we've done something wrong and we need to come back to God to receive His grace and forgiveness.

Realize, no matter what you've said or done, no matter how many times you've failed, no matter how great your sin—you're never outside the reach of God's love and mercy. The Lord extends forgiveness to you and calls you to walk in the freedom of His grace.

*“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace
to help us in our time of need.”*

(HEBREWS 4:16)

God is gracious and forgiving, yet He does not overlook or excuse the guilty.

“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty” (EXODUS 34:6–7 NLT).

God declares that all people are guilty of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).

God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:5–6).

“For every sin and
for all our sin—
God has grace
for us.”

God does not condemn those who are in Christ—who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (ROMANS 8:1).

God will judge those who reject Christ and His free gift of salvation.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (JOHN 3:36).

God doesn’t want you to hide your sin and guilt but to confess it and receive His grace.

“People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (PROVERBS 28:13 NLT).

God wants you to repent with godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

“For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There’s no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT).

God completely forgives and cleanses you of all sin.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 JOHN 1:9).

God calls you by His grace to live holy and leave sin behind you.

“Neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (JOHN 8:11).

God wants you to regularly remind yourself that He is gracious and compassionate.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made” (PSALM 145:8–9).

God wants you to forgive others who are guilty of wronging you.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

God wants you to tell others about His forgiveness.

“My friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (ACTS 13:38).

Key Verse to Memorize

*“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
(ROMANS 8:1)*

Key Passage to Read

“Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

*²Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!*

³When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

*⁴Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.*

⁵Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.

I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.”

And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”

(PSALM 32:1–5 NLT)

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

“I’ll never tell anyone.”

“No one will love me if they find out.”

“I feel dirty. Damaged.”

“God will never forgive me.”

Statements like these reveal the lasting sense of guilt and shame. If these emotions go unaddressed, they can impact how you view yourself, how you interact in your relationships, and how you relate to God. In order to break free from these strongholds, the feelings of guilt and shame need to be correctly defined and dealt with God’s way. With God’s help, you can start walking in the freedom of His grace.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD,
and the LORD answered me and set me free.”*

(PSALM 118:5 NLT)

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are not the same. **Guilt** focuses on your behavior; **shame** focuses on you.

Shame can be a response to what was done to you, but **guilt** is a response to something you have done.

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined **guilt**.

Shame focuses on who you are, but **guilt** focuses on what you've done.

Shame is experienced when your **guilt** moves from knowing you have done something bad to feeling that you are bad.

Shame creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior; **guilt** can motivate a desire to change—or justify emotions and behavior.

Shame produces feelings of loneliness that foster unhealthy dependencies, but **guilt** produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

Shame steals the joy of your salvation; **guilt** confessed restores joy in salvation.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*
(PSALM 51:12)

The Difference Between True Guilt and False Guilt

False guilt can blind and deceive people from seeing the truth about themselves, their situation, and God. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to already difficult emotions. Realize, there's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt. ...

True guilt is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues even after confessing and repenting of a sin that is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

True guilt leads to freedom, as it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- **False guilt** is resolved by rejecting the lies of the enemy and believing the truth of God's Word. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the “*accuser of our brothers and sisters.*” He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins which you have confessed and repented of, realize this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- “What am I hearing?” (Accusation.)
- “What am I feeling?” (False Guilt.)
- “What are the facts?” (I am not guilty. I am fully forgiven.)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: “Thank you, Father, that you don’t condemn me and don’t want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ.”

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

(ROMANS 8:1)

How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

If you are experiencing true guilt (feeling bad about what you’ve done), confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

“I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone” (PSALM 32:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing false guilt (feeling bad although you’ve done no wrong), reject the false guilt and replace the lies you’ve been led to believe with the truth of God’s Word.

“Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you” (PSALM 25:5 NLT).

If you are experiencing shame (feeling bad about who you are), embrace God’s love for you and meditate regularly on your identity in Christ as a chosen, beloved child of God.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 JOHN 3:1).

The powerful emotions of guilt and shame can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God’s Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

“In abundance of counselors there is victory.”

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

How to See Yourself through God’s Eyes

We naturally see ourselves and the world around us through eyes that are colored by our own thoughts and beliefs. We see ourselves as we think (assume) we really are. If you *think* you are a wretched person, whenever you look in a mirror, you will see a wretched person, and you will think and act and feel like the wretched person you believe yourself to be.

Realize, there’s a vast difference between *our perceptions* and *God’s perspective*. Our perceptions are often wrong. They can be unreliable and untrustworthy. But God’s perspective is never wrong. He sees everything completely and accurately. That’s why it’s important to see ourselves as God sees us.

That's why we need to willfully choose to yield ourselves to the Lord and to work with Him to transform us. We do this by allowing His truth to replace our faulty thoughts (often based on our feelings). Since all of God's thoughts are true, we need to saturate our minds with His words of truth—allowing those words to cause us to think as He thinks and see as He sees. Thus, He changes our minds . . . about Him, about us, and about others.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*
(ROMANS 12:2)

Seeing Yourself through God's Eyes

This process of change involves: (1) identifying the image you presently have of yourself, (2) identifying the contrasting image God has of you, and then (3) choosing to believe from His perspective rather than your own perception. It is that simple . . . and yet that profound.

Do you think . . . you are unacceptable?

God says . . . you are accepted by Him.

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (ROMANS 15:7).

Do you think . . . you are alone?

God says . . . He will never leave you nor forsake you.

“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Do you think . . . you are incompetent, a failure?

God says . . . He has made you competent.

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are bad, not good enough?

God says . . . He sees you through the lens of His mercy.

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (TITUS 3:5).

Do you think . . . you are a mistake?

God says . . . you are wonderfully made.

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (PSALM 139:14).

Do you think . . . you are defeated?

God says . . . you are more than a conqueror.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (ROMANS 8:37).

Do you think . . . you are unloved?

God says . . . He has great love for you.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (EPHESIANS 2:4-5).

Do you think . . . you can’t be forgiven?

God says . . . your sins are forgiven.

“He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins” (EPHESIANS 1:7 NLT).

Do you think . . . you don’t have enough strength?

God says . . . He will strengthen you Himself.

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (ISAIAH 41:10).

Do you think . . . you can’t have victory over a sinful habit?

God says . . . You have victory through Jesus.

“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:57).

God’s thoughts are revealed to us through His Word, which is powerful and able to transform us to be like Him in thought, in word, and in deed. . . .

*“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

(ISAIAH 55:10–11)

HOPE

The Anchor for Your Soul

What Is God's Heart on Hope?

The world cries out for hope. From individuals and families to cities and nations, the cries for justice, for peace, for *hope* ring out around the world. We cry out for answers, for guidance, for comfort . . . to make it through one more season, to overcome one more tragedy, to persevere one more day.

But there is only one hope that will satisfy our longings and our cries, one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.

From His first cry as a baby to His last cry on the cross, Jesus Christ came to give us hope. The Bible says of Jesus:

“In his name the nations will put their hope.”

(MATTHEW 12:21)

God is the God of hope.

“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit” (ROMANS 15:13 NLT).

God is the only lasting hope for everyone.

“You are the hope of everyone on earth, even those who sail on distant seas” (PSALM 65:5 NLT).

God wants your hope to be in Him.

“O Lord, you alone are my hope” (PSALM 71:5 NLT).

God wants His Word and His promises to be your source of hope.

“You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my source of hope” (PSALM 119:114 NLT).

God does not want you to put your hope in people or leaders.

“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (PSALM 118:8–9).

God does not want your hope to be in money or wealth.

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 TIMOTHY 6:17).

“There is only one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.”

God has a plan for your life that is filled with hope.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (JEREMIAH 29:11).

God wants you to have hope all day—every day.

“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (PSALM 25:5).

God gives you hope during times of trouble and suffering.

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (PSALM 42:5).

God strengthens you with His hope.

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (ISAIAH 40:31).

God keeps you anchored with His hope.

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (HEBREWS 6:19).

God wants you to know that no matter what happens—there is always hope.

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (PROVERBS 23:18).

Key Verse to Memorize

*“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

My Personalized Plan to Stay Anchored in Hope

True hope comes from knowing Jesus Christ, resting in Him and His plan for both my todays and my tomorrows. Therefore, when unexpected sorrows and hardships come, I will remember God’s promises to me found in the Bible.

*“I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him.
I have put my hope in his word.”*

(PSALM 130:5 NLT)

As I focus on renewing my mind with God's Word and deepening my hope in Christ, **I will . . .**

Remember that true hope is anchored in God.

- I will remember that true hope is found in God, who doesn't change—not in people, who do change.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's unchanging Word, not in shifting circumstances or cultural opinions.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's Son, who loves me and secured my eternity through His death and resurrection.

"And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you" (PSALM 39:7 NLT).

Recognize that when I feel hopeless, God calls me to trust Him.

- I will accept that in this broken world, I will inevitably face painful circumstances.
- I will accept that even believers can experience sorrow, loneliness, depression, and periods of desperation.
- I will accept that in dark times, God is with me and He desires to give me His love and hope.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (ROMANS 15:13).

Realize that there is always hope and God will help me overcome the obstacles in my life.

- I will trust that God is always with me, guarding and guiding me, fulfilling His purposes for me.
- I will trust that God is in control of the circumstances of my life, and I can learn and grow during both good and bad circumstances.
- I will trust that God can use me to be an encouragement to others who are facing their own obstacles.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; . . . The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever" (PSALM 138:7–8 ESV).

Rely on the Lord and others for support and help when I feel hopeless.

- I will remember that I don't have to suffer alone or in silence, and I will acknowledge my need for help.
- I will seek the support of a counselor, friend, or pastor when I feel unable to handle my situation or emotions.
- I will seek God in prayer, trusting Him to give me victory and use my trials for my good and His glory.

"Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory" (PROVERBS 11:14 NASB).

Recount my blessings, thanking God for them.

- I will thank God for all the good things in my life—for family and friends, work and play, clothes and food, rest and inspiration.
- I will do at least one thing a day that brings me joy and focuses my attention on Jesus.
- I will remember all the things God has brought me through in the past and trust Him for my future.

"Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (PSALM 130:7).

Reach out to others and share the hope of Christ.

- I will pray for those in my life who do not know the Lord—that God will save them.
- I will look for opportunities to share the hope of Christ with the lost.
- I will encourage others who are suffering or facing a trial with God's truth.

"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).

4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me
the person you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?

In relation to these topics, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin, change, or stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?

In relation to these topics, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?

What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding these issues? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?

Is there anyone in your life who needs help with these topics/issues? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?

What can you give thanks to God for today?

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself
and God our Father, who loved us
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort
and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.”
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

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