

Chapter 6

TRUE FREEDOM!

Monica is the track team's best long distance runner. Her coach tells her to drink plenty of water before a big meet she will be competing in a couple of days. Monica ignores her coach's advice because she has been feeling great and thinks she is well conditioned and ready to go. Besides, according to Monica, coach is always telling her what she needs to do and that can get real old sometimes.

The day of her meet she has discovered the weather has really changed and the temperature will exceed 100 degrees. Not long into her run she becomes exhausted from dehydration and she can't even finish her event let alone win it.



Did her coach want her to obey her instructions because she just likes to throw around her authority? Do you think she may have known something about the weather that Monica didn't? Why did Monica think she knew better than her coach? Is it possible her coach had Monica's best interest in mind? Would she trust her coach more the next time her coach gives her instructions?

God is the ultimate coach! Does God give us any instructions to live by? Are you motivated to obey Him or are you more like Monica when it comes to obeying? Do you trust God's instructions as much as our runner trusted the coach? Do you feel God's rules and instructions are too restrictive and they can get "old"

Disobedience carries consequences, often creating our own private prisons.

at times? Have you made a real effort to know what God's instructions are? Do you think God has your best interest in mind? These are important questions we need to ask ourselves.

Different people are motivated to obey God for different reasons. Some obey because they are trying to earn rewards in heaven. Some obey because they fear going to hell. Then there are countless others who don't seem to care about obeying God at all, including many who attend church on a regular basis. You will read later in this book (Chapter 9 – Dealing With Failure) how important God's unearned forgiveness (grace) is when we fail to obey. You have also read in Chapter 4 (The Only Way) how we can never be good enough to earn our way into heaven because our nature makes it impossible for us to keep God's standards (laws). So why then should we care about obeying Him? If we are going to care what should be our motivation to obey?

The following scripture gives us a clue about the benefits of obedience.

Deuteronomy 32:46,47 He said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

These verses tell us God's laws are not just idle words – they are our life and they allow us to live in the land safely. In other words God's standards (laws) protect us from harm – and too often it is ourselves that we need protection from. What many fail to grasp, or do not wish to grasp, is that just as there are consequences for trying to defy physical laws (you will get hurt if you jump off a 10 story building because of the laws of gravity) there are consequences for ignoring moral laws.

How do we know what God's standards and laws are? We learn about his standards and will for our lives by studying the bible. The bible serves three very important functions. The bible allows us to know who God is, shows us why we need Jesus and how through Him we can get to heaven, and gives us instructions on how to get the most out of life now. This last function is why we need to do more than just read the words, we need to act on the words we read and if we do the quality of our lives will be so much better than if we don't. This is what Jesus wants us to understand as he replies to a woman who shouted out to him "blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you".

Luke 11:28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Many know how the bible teaches us to live but just don't want to act on what they know. This is what James is addressing in James 1:22-25 (bible scholars believe James was the brother of Jesus or possibly he may have been one of the 12 apostles). He explains we need to do more than just listen or read the word of God, we need to do what it says. James states if we hear the word and don't do what it tells us to do, we are like someone who looks at their face in the mirror and immediately forgets what he or she looks like. We are just going through the motions when this happens.

James goes on to say the person who intently looks into the perfect law, the law that gives freedom, and remembering what he or she saw, and continues to do this, not forgetting what they have heard, he or she will be blessed in what they do. In other words, obeying God is good for us! Acting on God's truths will actually give us more freedom.

We should obey God because we know He loves us and knows what is best for our lives. God does have our best interest in mind. He knows the long-term effects (rewards or consequences) of what we do while we tend to only see the short-term effects. All too often we ignore potential consequences totally. The problem many Christians and non-Christians have is when the reasons and benefits behind God's laws are not clearly understood. This is especially true when God's instructions conflict with our desires. Who would argue we should not murder or steal? These laws are basic for survival and even atheists are in agreement with these and other obvious laws for our benefit.

If the coach in our example said "don't stay up all night" the day before the meet our runner probably would not have any trouble obeying this command because it would be obvious she would be too tired to run. Where we really struggle is when our fleshly (physical) desires take over and cloud our understanding of the reasons behind God's commands. Too often we understand the harmful effects of certain desires, but these desires have such a strong pull on us they cause internal conflicts in us. Physical desires are something we all struggle with, and Paul was no exception.

In Romans 7:21-23 he writes about the conflict it causes with our spirit. He said he found this principle at work in him - even when he wants to do good, evil is right there with him. His inner being delights in God's laws. But he finds another force effecting the members of his body,

and these forces effecting his body are waging war against his mind, his spirit, making him a prisoner of the sin at work in his body.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul again discusses this struggle. He warns the Galatians to live by the Spirit (submit to the Spirit) so as to not give in to the desires of the sinful nature (desires of the flesh as translated in the King James Version of the bible). He tells them the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to our sinful nature. He goes on to say the Spirit and our sinful nature (our flesh – KJV) are in conflict with each other, so that we do not do what we want.

You might be asking what is meant when the bible talks about the desires of the sinful nature, or the sin at work within our members of the body. Galatians 5:19,20 describe the acts of the sinful nature – sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like.

Although all these acts can be linked to a desire for physical pleasure, Romans 7:21-23 seems to narrow these acts to those that stimulate our senses, desires of our body that more directly result in some sort of physical pleasure. For certain our desire for physical pleasure can be our biggest struggle.

On the surface giving in to physical desires doesn't sound so bad but if you think about what causes many to destroy their lives it is when they have poor self-control over these types of desires. Common desires that can cause long-term problems for us are drinking, drugs, and sex. These desires can take over and control our lives and when they do we have an addiction problem. When one is addicted their "head" (or suppressed spirit) knows the harm they are doing yet stopping whatever they are doing is so very difficult. Addictions create a tremendous "bondage" of the addicted and these addicts are truly "slaves to sin".

Many fail to understand, or don't want to understand, the long-term effects of living for "the flesh" so they view God's moral laws and standards as something that only hinders their pleasure seeking fun, and for this reason they reject and even despise God. It is not these moral standards that ruin our fun but the effects of the consequences of our sin that ruins our lives. This is why James 1:25 states it is the perfect law that gives us freedom. Freedom from the bondage that sin will cause.

If you have any doubts about the bondage sin can cause just look around you. You will find many that are chronically unemployed because of drug or alcohol addictions. Substance abuse is a leading cause of homelessness. How many are killed in auto accidents every year because of alcohol or drugs, including many innocent victims? How much crime is committed because someone needs money to support their addictions and they have to steal because they can't hold a job? How many of us have seen alcoholism or drug dependence destroy lives and destroy families?

According to a report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1997 about 1 in 6 state prisoners reported committing crimes to obtain money for drugs. Overall 3 out of 4 state and 4 out of 5 federal prisoners may be characterized as drug or alcohol involved offenders. Drugs and alcohol keep our prisons in business.

I have personally seen how the drug "crack" cocaine can take someone down a road of bondage that leads to a life of self-destruction because that is the road my daughter was taking. And like so many destructive lifestyles the beginning of that road just doesn't look that dangerous. Crack is an inexpensive drug initially, but what it does to the user is create such a bondage to it that there is virtually nothing the user would not do to keep taking that drug, including stealing, pawning valuable possessions for practically nothing, and even giving in to a life of prostitution.

The following paragraphs selectively quoted from the “Cocaine Anonymous” web-site drive home how much of a “prisoner” you can become.

What is a cocaine addict? For months, for years, we who now freely admit that we are cocaine addicts thought that we could control cocaine when in fact it was controlling us. Many of us are still perplexed to realize how long we went on, never getting the same high we got in the beginning, yet we still insisting, believing – so distorted was our reality – that we were getting from cocaine what actually always eluded us.

We went to any lengths to get away from being ourselves. The lines got fatter; the grams went faster; the weeks stash was all used up today. We found ourselves scraping envelopes and baggies with razor blades, scratching the last flakes from the corners of the brown bottles, snorting or smoking any white speck from the floor when we ran out. We, who prided ourselves on our fine-tuned state of mind! Nothing mattered more than the straw, the pipe, the needle. Even if it made us feel miserable we had to have it.

Some of us mixed cocaine with alcohol or other drugs, and we found temporary relief in the change, but in the end it compounded our problems. We tried quitting by ourselves, finally, and sometimes managed to do so for periods of time. After about a month we imagined we were in control. We thought our system was cleaned out and we could get that old high again, using half as much. This time we would be careful not to go overboard. But we only found ourselves back where we were before, and worse.

We never left the house without using first. We didn't talk without using coke. We couldn't fall asleep, sometimes it seemed we couldn't even breathe without cocaine. We tried changing jobs, apartments, cities, anything – believing that our lives were being screwed up by circumstances, places, people. Perhaps we saw a cocaine friend die of respiratory arrest, and still we went on using!

What brought us to Cocaine Anonymous? Some of us hit physical bottom. It may have been anything from a nosebleed which frightened us to sexual impotence, loss of sensation or temporary paralysis of a limb, to a loss of consciousness and a trip to the emergency room, to a cocaine induced stroke leaving us disabled. Maybe it was finally our gaunt reflection in the mirror.

Others of us hit an emotional or spiritual bottom. No matter how much we used, we nevermore achieved elation, only a temporary release from the depression of coming down, and often not even that. We suffered violent mood swings. Perhaps we awoke to our predicament after threatening or actually harming a loved one, desperately demanding hidden money. We were overcome by feelings of alienation from friends, loved ones, parents, children, from society, from the sky, from everything wholesome. Even the dealer we thought was our friend turned to a stranger when we came to him without money. We were spiritually and emotionally deadened. Perhaps we thought of suicide, or tried.

Still others reached a different bottom, where our spending and lying lost us our jobs, credit, and possessions. We simply could no longer afford to use. Sometimes the law intervened.

What kind of lives has just been described? Does this describe content, fulfilled lives? No, these are individuals that started out enjoying what they were doing and their subsequent addiction took over and created a life of misery. Other mind-altering substances, especially alcohol, lead its users down the same destructive path. In fact alcohol always has had a very destructive influence over society, often creating very tragic consequences when least expected in addition to the problems caused by addiction.

An article that appeared in the Albuquerque Journal chronicles the horrible results of teens giving in to the allure of drinking, results that are becoming all too common. The story centered on a memorial service that was held for a 14 year old girl who died from drinking out of a gallon bottle of Vodka at a party. “Some cried, some buried their faces into the chests of friends; many couldn’t look at the photo (a picture of the victim displayed at the service) without breaking down” was the gut-wrenching scene described by the reporter. “My daughter died because she drank too much. It’s been hard on our family....and I know it would be hard on your families,” the victims mother said with a quivering voice, “you need to think twice” was quoted as her advice to those attending.

The article went on to describe other alcohol deaths that occurred in the past year in the community. A 15 year old student shot himself in the head at a party where drinking too much beer was a contributing factor, a 20 year old University of New Mexico freshman died from drinking up to 20 shots of liquor at a Halloween party, and a 16 year old drank himself to death from too much brandy at a small gathering. Add to this the countless stories about deaths due to drunken drivers of all ages, and the short-term dangers of drinking, along with the long-term problem of addiction, are quite clear.

Here’s What Experts Say About Marijuana and Teens*

“Marijuana is not a benign drug. Use impairs learning and judgment, and may lead to the development of mental health problems” – American Medical Association

“Smoking marijuana can injure or destroy lung tissue. In fact marijuana smoke contains 50 to 70 percent more of some cancer causing chemicals than tobacco smoke.” - The American Lung Association

“Marijuana use may trigger panic attacks, paranoia, and even psychoses, especially if you are suffering from anxiety, depression, or have thinking problems.” – American Psychiatric Association

“Marijuana can impair concentration and the ability to retain information during a teen’s peak learning years.” – National Education Association

For those that put a premium on getting “high” there is no problem in finding ways to satisfy that desire. From sniffing paint to using meth and acid, along with “designer” drugs such as ecstasy, there is no shortage of ways to jeopardize your health, and there are health risks anytime mind-altering chemicals are used. Even the thought to be harmless drug marijuana will reduce ones quality of life because studies have shown marijuana hinders learning and reduces the users ability to effectively deal with life (escaping is not dealing with problems!), is a proven gateway drug to more harmful drugs, and increases the chances of lung cancer as there are far more carcinogens in marijuana, three to five times more, than there are in cigarettes.

Do you think any of the people who have severely damaged the quality of their lives, and often the lives of others, from substance abuse planned the life they now have? Do you think they were saying the first time they started to drink or do drugs – “hey, today I am going to start down a road of self-destruction”? Of course not, they thought they had everything under control. Prisons are full of people who thought they had everything under control. There are people in the streets who thought they had everything under control. There are people who have ruined loving relationships because they thought they had everything under control. There are people in hospitals and there are people now in their graves who thought they had everything under control.

Substance abuse is sin because users have made drugs and/or alcohol their god, breaking the first commandment that states - you shall have no other gods before me. Users are looking to

drugs and alcohol to help deal with their problems or provide enjoyment instead of God. If you have to get “high” to be happy or deal with life you are dangerously close to going down that destructive road. You may be in control, or think you are in control initially but the dangerous fact is these “desires of the flesh” can totally take over your life. And when this happens you pay a horrible price – health problems, financial problems, legal problems, relationship problems, and even death!

We are constantly exposed to messages and peer pressure that makes us think drinking is what we need to have fun or deal with the pressures of life, and for many the same peer pressure is used to justify using drugs. Peer pressure can be especially dangerous for those going to college and/or are away from home for the first time. All of a sudden there is a huge increase in personal freedom. Constraints such as parental supervision are gone and consequences are not considered because the focus is now having fun today with little regard for tomorrow. Even if you have goals and aspirations that require personal sacrifices you will find plenty of individuals that have none and who only care about today. These individuals will try and influence others to adapt the same attitudes because a party of one is not much fun.

We are social beings because God created us with a desire to form relationships. In our culture there is tremendous social pressure to drink in order to fit in with our peers. As Christians we have freedom and that freedom includes having a drink or two with friends even though it is much better if we can learn to enjoy life without drinking. The problem is that we live in a world where God is not important to many and those that hold this view will try and influence your life. And drinking and even taking drugs are common activities for those that do not have a strong spiritual relationship and those who are not believers.

It is good to know people who are not believers because this gives you an opportunity to be a good influence on them. Just be very careful that you do not use your freedom to give in to their influence, especially if their influence leads to activities that offer a substitute for your relationship with God such as drinking or drugs. If this happens not being responsible with the freedom we have can manifest potentially life destroying substance abuse addictions. Always remember living the life God wants for you is what gives you true freedom, giving in to peer pressure than emphasizes living for indulgences can make you a slave to those indulgences, indulgences that can destroy your life.

One of the most alluring indulgences college and high school students are tempted with is sex. This is why I want to spend a little extra effort addressing sexual morality because we are constantly being bombarded with messages contrary to what God has to say about sex.

The bible gives us numerous scriptures warning us against sexual immorality. In Old Testament law violating certain moral standards such as adultery or other unnatural sexual acts were punishable by death (see the 20th chapter of Leviticus)! The ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God because of rampant sexual immorality (chapter 19 of Genesis) of the inhabitants.

The New Testament book of Acts describes the apostles concern for new believers during the Council of Jerusalem. The apostles did not want to burden them with a bunch of new laws, but among the very few standards they did want to emphasis was the command to refrain from sexual immorality (Acts 15:20). Jesus stated in Matthew 15:19 that sexual immorality comes from evil thoughts out of an evil heart. Paul tells us in Romans 13:13,14 to behave decently, not in sexual immorality and we should not be thinking of how to gratify the desires of our sinful nature and Galatians 5:19 tells us sexual immorality is an act of our sinful nature. 1 Thessalonians and

Ephesians 5:3 also tells us to avoid sexual immorality while Colossians 3:5, adds avoiding evil desires and lust along with avoiding sexual immorality.

Paul makes us aware of the unique consequences of sexual sins in 1 Corinthians 6:18. He tells us to flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. As you read in the next few pages hopefully you will see how sexual sins are more damaging to our body as well as our spirit than most other types of disobedience.

Obviously God knows of the great harm sexual immorality can do. Look at our society today! Can anyone argue against the obvious truth that sexual promiscuity has created tremendous

Three million young people are infected each year with one of nearly 60 sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The longer someone is sexually active the more likely that person will contract a STD (i.e. in ten years 30 million infections!). Many of these diseases carry huge health risks, including infertility and even death. It should not be difficult to understand the more active someone is sexually the greater the odds of health problems due to STDs. For example, females who in a lifetime have had sex with three or more men are 15 times

social costs? Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are rampant and are causing long-term health problems, sterility, and even death not to mention the social problems caused by unwanted pregnancies and broken marriages.

A female does not have to be promiscuous to suffer the effects of an unwanted pregnancy. Unmarried pregnant females are often faced with three unpleasant options, abortion which can carry tremendous psychological consequences because deep down inside mothers know a fetus is a human life, a forced marriage, or raising the child on their own. Raising a child can be difficult enough with two committed parents so imagine the difficulties for the mother and child if the mother is not emotionally ready or mature enough to raise a child

with or without the help of the father. This is already becoming an endemic problem in our society as countless teens are having babies and many of these teens are not prepared to make the sacrifices motherhood or fatherhood requires, and their children and society will and are suffering for it.

Yet television, movies, magazines, music, and even the Internet are pre-occupied with sex, and rarely do they ever deal with any of the consequences. In fact TV and movies often mock traditional Christian values pertaining to sex. What would sell more to their viewers, themes or story lines that emphasis constructive qualities that require some self-sacrifice now to have a better life in the future or themes that tell viewers – do whatever makes you feel good today? The reality is today's morals, including the greed of those who only want to sell what they are selling without considering the consequences of how they are selling, have created a world where self-control is downplayed and self-indulgence is the norm. We have created a world where we give up a high quality life so we can satisfy the pleasures of moment.

The print media and music industry are just as bad as the movie and television industry. All these influences are creating a disturbing trend for teens and preteens to conform to a culture that is placing an ever-increasing emphasis on sexuality. Britney Spears, Mariah Cary and other pop stars become role models for young girls and these media celebrities dress and act to draw attention to their sexuality. Many teen magazines promote fashion trends, trends due to what media celebrities wear, that are very revealing for young girls. You may be thinking – so, what's wrong with that?

An article in the Albuquerque Journal, written by Donald Bradley of Knight Ridder Newspapers, alerts us to some serious potential problems in the future for young girls because of

these trends. This article refers to a recent study done by the Girl Scouts of the USA that points out too many little girls are taking on big girl worries. Girls 8 – 12 are seemingly caught in “age compression” caused by a society that forces children to grow up too fast and a pop culture obsessed with sexuality. Girls are dating much younger and worrying too much about their appearance at an age when they are not emotionally mature enough to handle such pressures. The article quotes Leslie T. Dunn, Director of the Teel Institute in Kansas City that does research into child development, as saying “ten to fifteen years from now we could have a major problem with preteen pregnancy and preteen suicide”.

The article did refer to one 9 year old girl who wasn’t part of this trend because she was more interested in playing basketball than looking like Britney Spears. This is a prime reason why I am adamant about supporting women’s sports and why I have a real admiration and respect for women athletes. In an age of too few positive female role models female athletes represent a lifestyle that emphasizes the qualities of teamwork, self-sacrifice, self-control, perseverance, and hard work. The only measurements that matter are vertical in nature and they earn their recognition from what they achieve and not what they look like. You will never hear a coach say “my, you look good tonight so I’m going to put you in the game”. The only thing that the coach cares about is performance, and that is what should matter. I thank God for the emergence of women’s sports and I think it’s great that more women are taking advantage of the same character building benefits men have been able to do for many years by being involved in athletics.

MTV, Hollywood, advertising companies, and the entertainment industry are preoccupied with sex because sex sells. Keep this in mind – the companies that are using sex to sell, whatever they have to offer, do not care about you. They only care about your money! God cares about you! He knows what sexually transmitted diseases can do to you, especially diseases like aids that are killing people by the hundreds of thousands. He knows how living together before marriage destroys a sense of commitment that is essential to maintain a long-term relationship. He knows the problems caused by unwanted babies or mothers who are unprepared to give proper care for their babies. He knows how abortion can cause psychological harm. He knows the implications of broken families and failed marriages and how these implications harm our society. He knows how giving in to sexual desires can cause difficulty in remaining faithful to a marriage, eroding the trust needed for a successful relationship.

DOES COHABITATION BENEFIT A MARRIAGE?

There have been numerous studies showing that living together before a couple marries decreases the odds of a successful marriage. One study found only 26% of women and 19% of men married the person they were living with. Another study showed married couples that lived together before marriage were nearly twice as likely to divorce within the first 10 years compared to those married for the first time and who did not live together

In fact studies have shown the more active someone is sexually before marriage the less likely a future marriage will be successful. And God knows how obsession with sex can cause one to seek a perverse sexual lifestyle because they are never satisfied with normal sexual relations.

What can trigger an obsession with sex? An obsession with anything starts when we begin to dwell on whatever we are

becoming obsessed with in our thoughts. So the next obvious question might be what causes us to get obsessive thoughts about sex. Pornography, soft or hard, is a major contributor to getting many men (not limited to men) hooked on sex, especially perverse forms.

There are countless studies that show the dangers of pornography. At one time it actually

THE DANGERS OF PORNOGRAPHY

Although a small percentage of viewers of pornography become addicted, studies have shown several subtle dangers in addition to some of the more obvious dangers. These dangers are:

Decreased satisfaction with ones sexual partner.

An impression sex is unrelated to love, commitment, or marriage. Faithfulness becomes less important as men view women more as sexual objects and become less caring toward them.

Sexual arousal diminishes with increased exposure to porn. Consumers of porn then search out more uncommon sexual activities in order to become aroused. The user begins to search out more graphic porn and start using porn that would have disgusted them initially, and now it excites them.

Fantasizing leads to actualization. This is when pornography becomes most dangerous by leading to acts of rape, molestation, and murder.

took some nerve to go out and purchase pornographic materials and I believe the “shame” factor prevented many from buying porn. But now it is so easy to access, all you have to do is log onto the net or turn on your TV. Pornography can be highly addictive, especially for younger users, and I fear the easy access of porn will create more and more “addicts” along with the problems associated with porn addiction.

Pornography is not a victimless problem. As demand increases so must supply, and think about what constitutes that supply, especially if that demand is for child porn. How many are lured into this industry because of the increasing demand and more frightening yet, how many are abducted to satisfy the demand of porn users? And as users become more and more obsessed with porn their obsession becomes more and more

perverse, as studies have shown.

One of the last stages of pornographic addiction is to act out sexual fantasies and when this happens, rape and/or child molestation is not far behind. It is getting far too common to see on the news or read in the newspapers incidents of teachers, child care workers, and clergy being involved in sexually molesting children. Very often these individuals are found to have child porn in their possession. What troubles me is this type of perversion is more difficult to detect (and some say impossible to cure) than other sex crimes because the child victims may not be aware of what is happening or too afraid to say anything.

You have to ask yourself what causes an adult male to desire to have sex with children, often very young children? Genes, or a hormone that is produced to cause adults to crave sex with children, I doubt it? Many become child molesters because they were molested as a child, a learned behavior, but not all who were molested become child molesters. And not all child molesters were themselves molested as a child. Pornography can be the “trigger” for this behavior. This behavior can become more and more uncontrollable as the molester gets more into pornography.

So with so much emphasis on sexuality and sexually explicit media available, and even socially acceptable, it is not surprising that our societies obsession with sex contributes to an increase in the occurrence of promiscuity. But the media is not the only factor to blame. Age-old factors that contribute to promiscuity are a combination of peer pressure and low self-esteem. Females with low self-esteem can fall into the trap of thinking the only way any guy will love them is if they give in to the sexual advances of males. Males fall into the trap of thinking if females don't give in to their sexual advances then there is something wrong with them. The problem of forming our value on what the “world” (our cultural values of the day) deems important gets us into trouble (this topic will be covered in Chapter 7 (Who Am I?). Forming our value on what is

important to God will give us what it takes to overcome a poor self-image and fight harmful peer pressure.

The truth is it takes strength and character to exercise sexual constraint while giving in to sexual desires is due to a lack of self-control. Self-control is a universally accepted character strength, it is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), it is a key attribute to have in order to have a high quality life, and deep down inside I believe we know this. Self-control is especially important when it comes to choosing between what feels good for the moment and what is best for the future.

Many people have instinctive inhibitions when it comes to sex outside of marriage, and these inhibitions are not due to some repressive social mores as many would like to believe. I believe even though our bodies may tell us one thing when we are aroused our heads are telling us there could be big time problems if we give in to our desires. If someone doesn't seem to have these inhibitions then these are typically individuals who give little thought to the consequences of their actions. They are living for their selfish desires and they have little regard for those they are out to seduce. I find it interesting one of the effects of drug and alcohol use is that it inhibits a chemical in the brain, serotonin, that is responsible for sexual inhibitions. In other words there is scientific evidence we are designed to have these inhibitions.

Really give this some thought – if it was true that our Judeo-Christian sexual morals were repressive and inhibiting us from having a better life, then why are sexually transmitted diseases such a problem? Is nature just messing with us by making us pay a heavy price for something that is supposed to be so “natural”? Nature has a way of letting us know when we are doing good or bad to ourselves. For example, when you get drunk you get sick afterward. Your body is telling you “hey, don't do that anymore, your damaging me” when you suffer from a hangover.

If having sex outside of monogamous relationships is such a good thing then it doesn't make sense that there should be such a problem with diseases. You will never get a sexual transmitted disease if you and your future spouse only had or have sex with each other. Conversely the more sexual partners you have the greater your chances for contracting a STD. Nature is trying to tell us something, yet when it comes to sex we get deceived into accepting the idea that sexual self-control is “prudish” or some sort of character weakness.

There are also studies after studies that show severe personal and social consequences due to our disregard of sexual constraint. In a book titled “The New Guide to Psychiatry” the editor, a Harvard Medical School psychiatry professor, discussed the impact of the “sexual revolution” started in the 60s. He discovered this sexual freedom did not lead to greater overall pleasures, freedom, and more open and meaningful relationships. Instead clinical experience showed this new age of permissiveness led to feelings of self-contempt and worthlessness, along with an endemic of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Clinicians found that college students new found sexual freedom was unsatisfying and meaningless.

A study referred to in the book noted that although sexual behavior of college students was often a desperate attempt to overcome a strong sense of loneliness, these students found their relationships less than satisfactory and nearly void of the emotional closeness they were seeking. They suffered feeling of guilt because they were using others and concern because they were being used as “sexual objects”.¹

There is so much evidence that proves sexual constraint is good for us and society in the long-run, yet too many ignore this evidence because all that matters is living for what feels good for the moment. This is just more proof of Satan and dark spiritual forces out to destroy us (see

Chapter 12 – Be Prepared For War). We actually choose destructive behavior patterns instead of instinctively live the type of life that gives us more high quality years over our lifetime.

God knows there is a certain “moral order” needed to live life to the full. Anytime we ignore this moral order, when we try to take moral shortcuts, we set ourselves up for addiction problems. For example, gambling is substituted for being productive (earning a living), drugs and alcohol are a substitute for turning to God for joy and strength, and an obsession with sex, forming a brief relationship for just one purpose, ends up destroying quality relationships, such as marriage provides, that should last a lifetime. Nature is trying to tell us something, and it is God that created nature.

I believe one of the most damaging aspects of allowing our physical desires to cause us to ignore God’s standards is that it drives a wedge between God and ourselves. Often when we disobey God our disobedience is out of ignorance. When we give in to physical desires that go against God’s standards we are willfully disobeying Him. When we do this, as much as we may understand God’s grace, we have a much harder time returning to the relationship God desires. Guilt will raise its ugly head big time. I believe this issue is what the following scripture deals with.

Ephesians 4:19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

If this behavior (giving in to sensual desires) becomes a pattern in our lives we risk becoming desensitized to our spiritual nature. We then start to lower our standards of what is right and wrong and we begin to justify our disobedience. Our lives then become self-centered and self-destructive. The bottom line is sex according to God’s way is safe, socially responsible and beneficial, and in the long-run leads to a more trusting and satisfying relationship.

Studies done by the Family Research Council bear out the benefits of waiting to have sex until marriage. This organization polled 1,100 individuals and found that 72% of married traditionalists reported high sexual satisfaction with their spouse. Traditionalists were defined as those who strongly believed sex outside of marriage is wrong as opposed to non-traditionalists who have no or only some objection to sex outside of marriage. The satisfaction rate for unmarried non-traditionalists was 31% lower! It also was found strictly monogamous women experienced orgasm during sex at least twice as often as promiscuous women. Sex is far more enjoyable when we know it is used as God meant sex to be used – as the manifestation of real love between a husband and wife. Sex God’s way not only leads to a more satisfying and healthy marriage but also decreases the likelihood of infidelity, and decreases the chances of divorce.

I am going to close this discussion about the dangers of living to satisfy our physical desires by giving you a visual image to think about. Imagine a scale, a straight line with a plus 10 on one end and a minus 10 on the other end, and this scale represents life. The plus 10 end of this scale represents totally living in the Spirit and the opposite end represent totally living in the flesh, in other words, totally living to satisfy physical desires by getting high or having sex outside of marriage as often as possible. Now to live totally on the spiritual end we probably have to be physically dead and with God in heaven. Realistically we will live somewhere in between on this scale because our bodies are made to enjoy our senses.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying our senses. I love listening to music and I appreciate beauty and art. After 20 years of marriage sex is still one of my favorite aspects of my relationship with my wife. I believe there is much in life that is meant to be enjoyed, and it is often our senses

that give us enjoyment. The problem is when we live to satisfy our senses, in other words, when that is what is our controlling nature, what drives us.

Our goal should be to live lives that draw us closer to the spiritual end of our imaginary scale, therefore drawing us closer to God. Living to get high and/or have sex outside of marriage takes us down that scale in the opposite direction of God. The further we go down toward the destructive end, toward that minus 10, the farther away we get from God, and the harder it gets to come back to God. Our action and thoughts do take us in one direction or the other so we need to always be aware of what direction our lives are going in. The closer we go to God the better our lives will be and more we go away from God the closer we approach spiritual and even physical death. If you have been living toward the minus end of the scale and you are now committing, or even contemplating committing your life to Christ the important thing is not where you now are at on this scale, what is important is the direction you are heading toward!

The focus of this chapter up to this point has been forms of disobedience to God that lead to a physical bondage. There are other forms of disobedience that can harm us far more than what we realize. Lying, for example, can be very harmful and especially damaging to relationships. Too many fail to see any harm in lying and dishonesty, often justifying those actions. Being dishonest is more than just lying; it is treating others unfairly, justifying any kind of stealing or cheating, and using any form of deception that hides the truth. Being dishonest is not being trustworthy.

A commitment to obey God's standards will make us trustworthy! In any type of relationship trust is a key attribute for success in that relationship. You want to trust your coach or boss is treating you fairly, trust in a marriage is essential, trust in business dealings is needed, and trust is even important for a friendship. Trust is based on honesty, fairness, and a commitment to do what is right. A person with these qualities is said to have integrity. Integrity is having a strong commitment to do what is right, even if doing what is right appears to not be in your own best interest. In the long-run doing what is right will always be in your best interest. Paul makes it clear integrity was important to him in his letter to the Corinthians.

2 Co 8:21 For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

The bible shows integrity is important to God. Proverbs 11:1 tells us the Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. In other words God hates it when we cheat each other, and it pleases him when we do business with integrity. Proverbs 12:22 states the Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.

Integrity makes the world a better place to live for you as well as others and conversely a lack of integrity makes the world more dangerous. A major concern I have is that integrity seems to mean nothing to too many people. A HBO movie called "Cheaters" was about how a high school debate team cheated to win a major competition. I can't recall any strong dialogue in this movie condemning cheating and I remember a great deal of dialogue justifying cheating and this bothers me. Cheating is becoming more and more common in academics, even affecting our military academies, institutions where "honor" is supposed to be valued. What concerns me is there seems to be little outrage against cheating because this behavior is actually becoming socially acceptable.

How often do we here of individuals making excuses for or even justifying politicians who lie or commit immoral acts because they feel if this politician gives them what they want then it doesn't matter. We will typically hear the excuse "they all do it" when justifying politicians who lie to achieve what they want. The problem with someone who lies to get what they want is if they lie to someone else why do you think they would not lie to you? If our society placed a higher

value on integrity, politicians, public officials, and others in a leadership position would be more careful with their words and actions if they knew they would be removed from their position because of a lack of integrity.

Think about this for a minute – if getting what we want takes priority over doing what is right, then what is there to stop us from using guns and violence to get what we want? If winning is everything and doing what's right means nothing then why would not the cause justify the consequences of violence? In other words whoever has the most or biggest guns wins! There are countries where this is how things get accomplished and this same reasoning is used to justify terrorism. I believe it has been our Judeo-Christian values that have prevented this from happening in our country.

I fear the restraints our society has had to settle matters without violence may be eroding because God is becoming less important to our culture. The Gore/Bush election is a good example of how our sense of right and wrong is becoming less important because it exposed how many public officials, journalists, lawyers, and politicians only cared about winning instead of doing what is right. Election laws are being ignored, common sense proposals to prevent illegal voting (showing identification) are not acted on, and votes are tampered with by public officials. This is not something new, but I believe it is becoming more and more prevalent.

When God becomes meaningless integrity suffers because it is not as important to those who have little use for God. Justifying lying, violence, bribery, and cheating is much easier to do because there is no one to be accountable to and no unchangeable standard to follow. If one believes they will gain by being dishonest or violent there is nothing to hold them back except for a fear of getting caught.

I have been primarily talking about integrity on a public scale but it is most important on a personal level. When spouses, children, parents, friends, or anyone else you have a relationship with lie to you how does that affect your trust in that person? I believe next to knowing that the person you have a relationship with cares about you, trust is what it takes for a successful relationship. So how do we build up our integrity? Having a love of God will give you a desire to try to live up to God's standards and this will result in building your integrity. You will know God knows what you are doing, and you will want to please God because our nature is to try and please those we love.

Loving God is the secret to what will make the difference in our ability to obey God and overcome sin. It will not be rewards in heaven, and scriptures do give some indications there will be rewards, because just getting into heaven will be so great and rewards need to be given soon after the deserving deed to have the desired effect. It won't be a fear of hell for the same reasons relating to consequences. Knowing obeying God's laws are for our own benefit may not even be very effective because we constantly develop harmful habits even though we know what we do is not good for us.

A love of God is what will give you the power to overcome addictions and other sins that are robbing you of the fulfilling life God wants you to have. 2 John 1:6 states love is obeying God's commands. Jesus makes the connection between love and obedience in the following scriptures.

JN 14:15-21 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you

will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

We underestimate the power of love. It is often a love for someone else that gives addicts the incentive needed to tackle their problems. It is easier to love when we know we are loved and no one will love us more perfectly than God. If you are having problems overcoming addictions or bad habits I would recommend you really think about what Jesus is saying in John 14:15-21. He is giving us a promise – if we love Him we will be able to obey His life giving instructions. Our love will result in Jesus being active in our life as He reveals himself to us. Our obedience resulting from our love will cause our prayers to be more effective and we will have the powerful help of the Holy Spirit (Spirit of Truth).

The more you know God the more you will trust Him. This is very important when you don't always understand the reasons behind God's commands. I admit it is helpful if we can understand the benefits of all God's requirements and learning about the reasons behind God's commands and standards is one of the reasons I enjoy reading the bible, reading books, and listening to sermons. But there are times when we just have to trust God knows what He is doing when He gives us certain standards. As I said before in this writing if God can create the universe then He probably can figure out what is best for our lives. But too often we think we know better! One of Satan's oldest lies is that we can be like God and know good from evil (Gen.3:5) because this is how he tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. God tells us we are not capable of understanding what He understands.

Isaiah 55:8,9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

We may not always understand all of God's standards but we need to trust that he knows what is best for all of us, after all he is the perfect holy God, the source of all moral and physical laws. So if the bible tells us not to use coarse language or unwholesome talk (swearing) for example as stated in Ephesians 4:29, then that is what we should do. We may think swearing is only words and what harm can be done from it. I have some ideas why it is good not to swear (lack of self-control, disrespecting God when using His name in vain, an indication of what's in your heart) but I confess I probably may not be able to give a real satisfactory answer to convict someone they shouldn't swear. I just trust God knows swearing is something we shouldn't do. When God commands something that's all I really need to know because of my faith in Him.

I sincerely hope you understand God's standards are for your own benefit, especially those standards that discourage us from living to satisfy the "desires of the flesh". So if you now understand then what do you do if you believe you may be in "bondage" to alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex, lying, swearing, or anything else that controls you, especially if your spiritual relationship is not very strong? What do you do if you know you need to turn to God to free you but at this point know little of God? What is that first step?

This is the dilemma I felt my daughter was facing when I discovered she had a serious drug problem. And after a morning of intense prayer for my daughter God showed me in a very strange way just what Amy needed to do. I was sitting at a picnic table alongside a river during one of our family getaway weekends, an especially needed getaway since our daughter just came home after a three-day drug binge. After praying I started reading the book "How Now Shall We Live", by

Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey. All of a sudden a dragonfly landed on the picnic table and turned its head sideways and was looking directly at me. It did this for several seconds, to the point when I asked “what are you up to” (I don’t normally talk to insects!). As soon as I said that, the dragonfly hopped on the book for a few seconds and then took off. Out of curiosity I looked where the dragonfly landed (about the 3rd or 4th paragraph on page 290) and it was on an area that was describing what a Cocaine addict, who was in prison for a drug related crime, did to free himself from his addiction. I really thought this was pretty amazing.

The answer was to cry out to God for strength. He had to admit his addiction was something stronger than he could ever lick on his own, and this guy was pretty tough. He said he had to pray umpteen times a day and while he was doing this his old habits began to fade away and he started to feel like the new creation that is described in the bible. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but what an appropriate one! I will never be convinced that was the case. To me it was as if God knocked on my door and said “here is what she has to do” right after I asked for His help. So you pray, pray, pray, and pray again. You get others to pray for you. This is where everything starts, you have to tell God you need Him, you have to go to Him for your strength, and He will come through.

And keep on praying, don’t get spiritually lazy just because things seem to be turning around. This is what happened to my daughter, by her own admission, and after a period of staying clean she began to use drugs again. Our prayers never stopped so God got her attention again, only this time He had to use the law and a court ordered drug rehabilitation program. She stopped praying and weakened spiritually, which led to using.

Another step you need to take is to stay away from those who are engaging in the activity you are trying to free yourself from. Sometimes an entire change in your environment may be needed to stay away from destructive influences (“triggers”). There are always an abundance of people that are good at pulling others down so you need to search for those that are willing to pull you up (just as it is physically easier to pull something down than to lift it up, the same holds true when it comes to those that influence our spiritual and moral lives). Getting involved in support groups such as AA or NA may be essential to overcome substance addictions, professional counseling may help, and a getting involved in church and other forms of Christian fellowship should be a great source of finding those who can “pull you up”.

If you want to live on the spiritual end of that scale then obeying God will be important to you. You need to understand obeying is much easier when you really want to instead of obeying mainly because you feel you should. If you obey for the latter reason you will be burdened with guilt when you fail to obey, and we do fail, and life can become a real drag because you will feel in bondage to a bunch of dos and don’ts. A love of God will be what will give you a desire to obey and a desire to know God’s instructions. How do you love God? You love Him when you know Him and His love for you. Spiritual growth through prayer, fellowship, and above all reading your bible (see Chapter 11 – The Game Plan) is what will allow you to know and love God. Obeying will then become a joy instead of a burden and this will free you from destructive habits. You will be living on the spiritual end of that scale and because of living by the Spirit your overall quality of life will improve. You will experience joy, peace, contentment, and love that you may not have experienced before. You will be well on your way to having a life of purpose, value, and fulfillment.

