

NEXT STEPS WITH JESUS ON HIS JOURNEY TO CALVARY

Perhaps you are starting to see that Jesus really can identify with every kind of abuse, that He really can understand every form of shame and humiliation. Perhaps you are starting to feel released from shame and guilt about past abuse. However, maybe you still wonder what to do with the negative patterns you've developed as a result of experiences that were not your fault.

Since we read that Jesus never numbed His pain, maybe you also wonder: How can He identify with all the different ways we try to medicate ourselves, whether legal or illegal, socially acceptable or not? How can He identify with the drug addict, food addict, sex addict, or the Pharisee who needs to look good to others at church—hiding behind a façade of spiritual superiority that is really pride and self-righteousness?

Join us in the following pages as we dig deeper into the gospel to uncover the root and fruit of addiction—and the truth that can finally set us free.

CONNECTING WITH JESUS ON THE CROSS

Our Story Is Jesus' Story:

Alone

Abandoned

Betrayed

Stripped naked

Physically violated

Shamed and humiliated

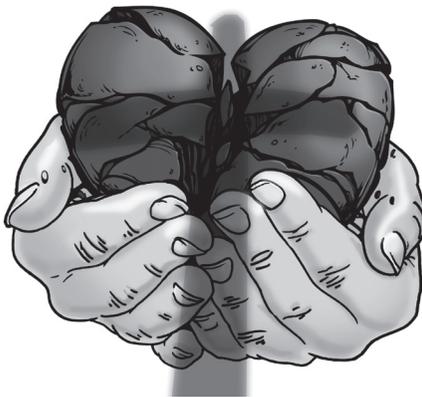
Verbally and mentally abused

Tempted to numb pain

Rejected and forsaken

Resurrected

“With his stripes we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5 (KJV)



CHAPTER 20



RICK'S STORY OF TEMPTATION AND ADDICTION

The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.³⁸

He awoke to the sound of his wife's voice.

"I love you, honey," she whispered in his ear, snuggling closer. They were newlyweds.

For some reason, Rick didn't know why, his body stiffened. He distrusted the sincerity of his own words as they came out of his mouth: "I love you, too." He was glad his back was to her, so she couldn't see his face.

It was Sunday, their day to sleep in. Neither one was yet used to these lazy

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mornings together. But as his wife hugged him, Rick's discomfort only grew.

This is too good to be true, a voice whispered in his heart. This won't last. Much as he didn't want to listen, he couldn't ignore it. *What if I've made a mistake?* he wondered. *What if this marriage was a mistake?*

After the way his life had been, Rick just couldn't believe that his wife really wanted to be with him. Or that she found him attractive. Or that she could continue to love him. In fact, after the way his life had been, he really wasn't sure about his own ability to exist in a loving relationship. But his insecurity was part of the reason he had gotten married in the first place. He had figured maybe being married would take away his other, well, "problem." Maybe, he had figured, his wife could provide the "fix" he needed, stand in for that other "thing" he had been using to make himself feel better.

But as his wife snuggled with him, resting her head against his shoulder, a dull pain gnawed at him. Already he knew he had expected too much.

It's early. It's still new. Soon she'll lose interest. And then what will I have? The voice continued. How could it be that the very woman he loved could make him feel so threatened? And why was it that such a simple show of affection brought on these feelings of impending rejection? Rick couldn't listen to the thoughts anymore. Without even turning to look at her, he pulled away, swung his feet over the side of the bed, and sat up.

"I'm hungry, let's get some breakfast," he said, leaving his wife to stare after him in confusion and wonder a single, painful question of her own: *What's wrong with me?*

Both felt like they'd just been played—but neither realized who was really behind this deceptive game. For a long time the enemy had been whispering lies to Rick so he would seek comfort from something else. Something—Satan wanted Rick to think—that could protect him from depending on another person too much.

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That something was pornography, and by this time, Satan had already succeeded in making Rick “look.” A lot.

THE PREVALENCE OF PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

In the church, 50 to 70 percent of men admit to struggling with pornography, and we have to wonder what the statistics would be if all men were honest.³⁹ Because this is such a huge challenge inside and outside the church—with well-known speaker and author Josh McDowell calling it the “greatest threat to the church”⁴⁰—we will focus on pornography addiction in this chapter. And sadly, just as it is more difficult for men to report sexual abuse than it is for women, it is also more difficult for the 18 percent of young women who struggle with pornography to seek help for this problem than it is for men.⁴¹ Fortunately, the same biblical principles that bring freedom to men will do the same for women, which is why this chapter applies equally to both. As you read, we hope you will also see how these powerful biblical principles open the door to healing and freedom from every other addiction as well (food, cutting/self-harm, smoking, alcohol, gambling, work, etc.).

ADDICTION DEFINED

My friend, Dr. Ricardo Whyte, who is also the director of the Chemical Dependency Unit at the Behavioral Medicine Center at Loma Linda University, describes addiction as having two parts. Part one involves a

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compulsive use or engagement with the addiction. Part two involves the negative consequences.

The book *Craving for Ecstasy: How Our Passions Become Addictions and What We Can Do About Them* offers another definition discussing the neuroscience behind our habits:

Addiction: self-induced changes in neurotransmission that result in behavior problems. This new definition encompasses a multidisciplinary understanding of compulsive problems that involves the concepts of personal responsibility (the behaviors are self-induced); biochemical effects (the body's neurotransmission changes); and social reactions (society absorbs the . . . consequences of problem behaviors).⁴²

I would add to these definitions a simple one of my own: an addiction is any behavior designed to move a person from feeling bad to feeling good. Unfortunately, this often results in that person settling for feeling numb, because the behaviors, attitudes, or substances we try have less and less power to make us feel good over time—if we are turning to “it” instead of turning to God.

SATAN'S PLAN—ROOTS OF ADDICTION

William Ralph Inge once said the best time to influence a child is a hundred years before he is born.⁴³ There is much truth in this statement because Rick's father and mother had parents with problems, who also had parents with problems, all the way back to the problems our original parents had in the Garden of Eden. As we learned in chapter 1, Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden is the root of all our problems, in fact.

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But what do our addictions have in common with Adam choosing Eve (sex) over God and Eve choosing the forbidden fruit (food and appearances) over God? It could be a coincidence that food and sex were the original addictions in the Garden of Eden—and then again, maybe not. Even today, we still see food and sex as two of the top addictions taking out Christians and non-Christians alike. Regardless of whether our addictions are obvious ones like alcohol, drugs, sex, or food, or less obvious ones like pride or self-righteousness, they are all about power and control. In the Garden of Eden, Adam's decision to passively join Eve was not really about sex, nor was Eve's decision to choose the fruit really about food. Both Adam and Eve's "addictions" stemmed from a desire to gain power and control that was not theirs to begin with, whether it was going for what they wanted or going along with what someone else wanted. Eve, along with Adam, wanted to create a sense of safety and power through knowledge. But in the end, Adam and Eve's desire to know more and be more than who they really were caused them to doubt God's Word—and trust Satan's instead.

Just as the forbidden fruit offered Eve the illusion of immortality (living on her own, apart from God), so do our addictions today. Whether we turn to pornography, alcohol, work, affairs, self-pity, or being overly "religious" (self-righteous), all addictions promise a sense of being alive, loved, accepted, or safe—but only for a short time. Unfortunately for the would-be addicts inside each of us, God's Word tells us that God alone has immortality (Heb. 3:7–11; 1 Tim. 6:15–16), that He alone has self-sustaining life. This is why the following quote carries so much meaning in so few words: "You can never get enough of what you don't need—because what you don't need will never satisfy you."⁴⁴ In other words, anything we choose besides God will lead away from true life, because anything we choose besides God will lead to shame, which will naturally lead to hiding from God, which will finally lead to death (James 1:12–18).

SATANIC PING-PONG AND THE CYCLE OF ADDICTION

Today, just as God sought Adam and Eve after they had sinned, He seeks for us when we've sinned. And just as He found Adam and Eve hiding behind fig leaves after their sin, now He finds us hiding behind our addictions. Just like Rick with his addiction to pornography, many of us are still trying to create a sense of safety by hiding the very parts of our hearts that need healing. Instead of being fully satisfied, we settle for being fully insulated from the only hope we have. Instead of experiencing the passion that comes from being fully known by God, we settle for an empty, self-manufactured sense of "safety." And when we are finally caught in an addiction, we only end up reinforcing the bad feelings that led to it in the first place—just like Rick as he struggled to erase memories of a painful childhood.

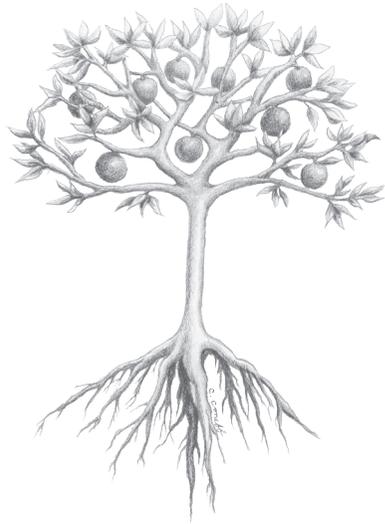
STEP ONE—SATAN SETS RICK UP TO BE HURT

Using Rick's own parents as his main players, Satan started early in making Rick feel neglected. Rick didn't know how many times he had been left to huddle with his baby sisters in his room while his father abused his mother, verbally and emotionally, outside the door. And even when his parents weren't fighting, Rick feared abandonment, because Satan was right beside him, feeding him negative messages like these:

- *I'm worthless.*
- *I'm rejected.*
- *I'm not accepted.*

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Using these messages, Satan wanted Rick to believe that this insecure child was who Rick was—that this was his truest, deepest identity. Notice that Satan did not start with pornography, but rather set the stage with subtle messages. He knew if he could get Rick to believe his lies, they would become negative roots—and these roots, in turn, would eventually lead to a deadly addiction.



STEP TWO—SATAN SETS RICK UP TO HURT RICK

Terrified that his father would leave his mother, his siblings, and him—and feeling powerless to do anything to earn his father’s love—Rick made a vow to protect himself, so he would never be powerless again. Now, just as Satan had used Rick’s dad to begin his deceptions, he used Rick’s brother to introduce porn, interweaving as many storylines of pain and self-protection as he could. And feeling weak, insecure, and unaccepted, Rick was ripe to receive this next deception—because it seemed to promise power in the face of chaos, a sense of acceptance in the absence of love. So began an addiction that would last over twenty years. So began Rick’s cycle of temporary relief, then guilt followed by shame, and finally the need to remedy that shame with the same medicine that made him feel so bad in the first place: pornography.

THE MESSAGE OF PORNOGRAPHY

Whenever I pray with men struggling with this addiction, I ask them to define the message they get from engaging with pornography. The number one response by far is “I’m wanted,” with similar responses such as, “I’m loved,” “I’m strong,” “I’m important,” “I’m accepted,” “I’m not rejected,” “I’m not a loser,” and “I’m not alone” following close behind.

You see, the same fiend who first tempted Adam to choose Eve over God in the Garden of Eden has always understood the needs that men have—and he understands how to push their buttons. He is the one who also uses young girls seeking approval to speak to a man’s need to be wanted. Satan deceives these girls into taking off their clothes, offering their bodies without their souls—inviting a man to fantasize that she is offering herself just to him. But when she separates her body from who she really is, the girl becomes devalued as an object. And as the man separates *his* body from *his* deepest needs—to be wanted, loved, and strong—pornography also devalues him.

In Rick’s case, he feels good while he is looking at pornography. But as soon as he finishes looking, he starts to feel empty and ashamed—so he tells himself, “I won’t look” (which means he is thinking about not looking, which means he is already thinking about looking). Then, with Satan’s assistance, he thinks, “I’ll just look for a minute,” even as he knows it will be more than a minute. He finally tells himself, “I’ll just look one more time, and never again,” only to repeat this pattern over and over again—that same pattern I’ve been calling the cycle of sin-and-forgiveness.

STEP THREE—SATAN REINFORCES THE CYCLE OF SIN-AND-FORGIVENESS

Although Rick had been “looking” since the age of five, when he began his marriage Satan’s game was only just beginning. Now, with a wife in the picture and kids soon to come, Satan knew he had a lot more work to do.

Because Rick didn’t understand that his real problem was not with pornography (a fruit), but with lies in his heart (the root), he mistakenly thought that a “real girl” by his side would fix everything. But now that Satan had convinced Rick he was *unwanted*, *unaccepted*, and *rejected*, Rick was finding that real closeness, and really being known by his wife, was impossible. After all, he was scared that being known would mean being “found out.”

And so he returned to porn with a renewed need to feel strong, to feel like a man; but, of course, instead of offering lasting power, porn only brought more guilt and shame. And with more guilt and more shame came more opportunity—for Satan. Now, Satan took that opportunity to plant his crowning lie: *I’m unforgiveable*. With this lie, Satan hoped to prevent Rick from even attempting to approach God so he could keep him in his cycle of sin and shame forever.

At the same time, Satan was working on Rick’s wife, sending her messages of self-doubt (in first-person language, of course) like, *Why am I not good enough for Rick?* As the game unfolded, then, not only was Satan gaining more leverage for sinking Rick, but he was also gaining more influence over Rick’s whole family. And ultimately, he was setting the stage to repeat the pattern over and over again with future generations.

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YOUR TURN: IDENTIFYING WITH ADDICTION

Alcohol, drugs,	being abusive,	detective and romance
caffeine, food, sugar,	being religious	novels, watching
pornography, affairs,	(quoting scripture,	sports, shopping
dieting, cutting,	trusting in head	excessively, cleaning,
cheating, lying, anger,	knowledge without	working out, playing
stealing, prostitution,	love), being self-	video games, spending
depression, pride,	righteous, being right,	time on the Internet
self-pity, spiritual	being judgmental,	(news, Farmville,
superiority, rescuing	being overweight,	Angry Birds, etc.)
others/codependency,	overworking, reading	

Some are socially accepted and some are not, but no matter what society says, each of these substances or behaviors can become addictive. Which of these items tempt you? The first few, of course, are commonly classed as addictions. But what about the rest? How could all of these things fit under the umbrella of “addiction”? Maybe we’ve joked about a friend who is “addicted to shopping,” or coworkers who are “news junkies” or “sports junkies”—maybe we’ve even said something similar about ourselves in relation to a “harmless habit”. But do we really understand what we are saying?

SIXTY BILLION DOLLARS AND STILL GAINING

Just think for a moment about the language many of us use to describe food. We call certain food “comfort food,” or we say we are “hungry for love,” which signals that using food for comfort is the “fruit” of a deeper longing. And because there is a deeper longing underlying our cravings, food can only bring temporary satisfaction to our hearts (though it often brings permanent

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pounds to our bodies). The following data reveals that there is more to dieting than meets the eye:

Americans spend more than sixty billion dollars annually trying to lose weight. Unfortunately, 90-95 percent of those who diet will end up being as heavy or heavier than they were before.⁴⁵

The truth is, every addictive habit known to mankind, legal or illegal, is directly connected to numbing our pain so we do not have to feel it. Unfortunately, any addiction can also desensitize us to the suffering of those around us. But whether we primarily hurt ourselves or others, every addiction is denial in action, with the ultimate destiny being death to intimacy; death to physical and spiritual health; death to marriage; death to our ability to really enjoy life; and death to personal, relational, and physical growth. As the Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12).

This would be really bad news if not for the Suffering Messiah, who, we’ve argued, is our solution to every problem. But when we’re talking about addiction, especially an addiction like pornography, we may wonder, how can Jesus identify with Rick? In the next chapter, we will learn:

- How Jesus fulfilled prophecy to identify with addiction.
- How Jesus intentionally suffered to win victory over addiction.
- How Jesus can replace our addictions with a longing for what our souls truly crave.
- How Jesus can change our identities so our addictions no longer define us.