



SESSION 3
Addiction



IT'S NOT GOD'S WILL FOR YOU TO LIVE OR DIE BEHOLDEN TO ANYTHING BUT HIM. GOD DOESN'T WANT YOUR LOYALTY TO GO TO ANYONE ELSE BUT HIM.



My favorite novel is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. It's about a small town lawyer in Alabama who defends an African-American man who is wrongly accused of rape. Atticus Finch has kids, Jem and Scout. In the course of the book, Jem tears up Mrs. Dubose's camellia bushes. For his punishment, Jem has to read to her every afternoon. She is old, she is dying, she was the cranky, nosy neighbor, and Jem doesn't like being there at all. While he doesn't like it, he complies and reads the book every afternoon until a timer goes off. For the life of him, Jem can't understand why he has to do this.

A little later, Mrs. Dubose dies and Atticus explains to Jem why he was over there. Mrs. Dubose was fighting an addiction to morphine. And as long as Jem was reading, she could pay attention to what Jem was reading, fight the addiction, and not give in. So every time he read, they would stretch the time out—a little longer and a little longer—until she was able to withstand the craving for

morphine and be free of her addiction to it. Atticus explained to his son Jem that she didn't want to die "beholden to anything."

That's an interesting phrase isn't it? She didn't want to die beholden to anything.

In your own words, what do you think it means to be beholden to something?

It's not God's will for you to live or die beholden to anything but Him. God doesn't want your loyalty to go to anyone else but Him. The Bible talks about God being very jealous over us the way a husband is jealous for his wife's attention. Many times people misread that and think behaviors like jealousy are beneath God. We know jealous people and they aren't attractive. So why would God act like that?

Read the first two commandments from Exodus 20:3-6. What do these verses tell you about God's jealousy?

The reason we often misunderstand this concept is we see it coming from an angry and judgmental God. We can't understand the command to have no other gods before Him is given out of God's mercy. God is the only One who can hold your life together. If you put anything or anyone else in the center of your life, your life will fall out of control. That's why He insists on being there. It's not out of jealousy or His ego. It's given to us in mercy.

This session is about addiction. Before we go on, I want you to hear me. You might be dealing with pretty tough stuff, and I'm not a doctor. We're going to

be dealing with the spiritual aspects of addiction, which is important, but there are also physical realities when you are addicted to certain things. And you need to be treated physically.

If you're addicted to cocaine, you need to be under a doctor's care. If you're dealing with alcohol addiction, you need to be under medical care. Most addictions have a process to walk you through the physical aspects of the addiction before you can begin to deal with the spiritual and emotional aspects of the addiction. In fact, you likely know of people who have done pretty well dealing with the physical aspects of addiction, and then, when they have to deal with the spiritual and emotional pain that drove them to addiction in the first place, they'll relapse.

If you're an addict, you can choose anything (or sometimes something chooses you) to help you deal in an unhealthy way with your pain. It could be cocaine. It could be alcohol, sex, pornography, or work. People are even addicted to the Internet. It could be that you use food to self-medicate in order to ease the pain that you're feeling. It could be any number of things. Whatever your drug is—we're simply going to call it the "drug of choice."

Is there anything you're aware of that you have become beholden to? If so, what is it?

Have you ever pondered whether or not this may be an addiction?

I don't want you to read this and think I have it all together. I don't. Many of the things I'm writing about I've learned the hard way. And everyone deals with this temptation in one way or another. Our lives are filled with pain. We hurt. We're tired of hurting. We want to find something to make the pain go away.

A CASE STUDY ON THE CHURCH IN GALATIA

The church in Galatia was Paul's problem child. He usually begins his letters with "I, Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ, saved by the mercy" Next he gives a little bit of his testimony. Then he usually says, "To the saints," followed by describing the churches. Finally he gives some kind of blessing to whom he is writing.

However, he shortened his normal pleasantries with the church in Galatia. Listen to the language he uses at the beginning of his letter:

I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to change the good news about the Messiah. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him! For am I now trying to win the favor of people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ. Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not based on human thought. For I did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation from Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:6-12

Paul asks them, "Who is messing with you?" That's where he starts. "Who has messed with you? They've gotten you off track. You started so well. Now I don't even know where you are."

He reminds them of the gospel that he preached about Jesus Christ being sent from God to die for sinners. It's the price that sin required, and that's the only

price. It's the only price that can be paid for sin. You can't add anything to it, or you can't take anything away from it. That is the gospel.

The word, *gospel*, is often tossed around in Christian settings and Christian conversations. How would you define *gospel*?

How has the truth of the gospel in Christian culture today been twisted or perverted?

In Paul's time, there was a group of people in Galatia who came behind him and said, "If you really want to be a Christian, you have to do these other things too." And they brought in the Jewish Laws and said you have to keep the Laws of the Old Testament. You have to keep the dietary laws. You have to keep all the religious laws.

So all of a sudden, the church in Galatia that was free from the Law in Christ is now trying to behave and keep all the rules. They gave their power over to the keeper of the rules, because there was always somebody totaling up the points.

"Minus one, you didn't do that well. Plus one, you did that well."

It was always a matter of points.

"I've got to have enough points for today or I won't be a good-enough Christian."

It's like somebody was determining what "cool" was. But Paul didn't get that memo. He wasn't at that meeting. He didn't know who those people were

or who determined the cool factor, but there was always somebody keeping points. Paul writes the defense, simply stating it's Jesus and Jesus alone.

Let me remind you of a fast way to find heresy—false teaching. Any time you hear the words, “Jesus and ...” or “Jesus or ...,” you're into heresy. Anybody who says you have to believe “Jesus and ...,” says that the suffering and death of Jesus wasn't enough. That's heresy. Anybody who says “Jesus or ...,” says there's another way. Jesus told us there is only one way.

Now I know, in our day of political correctness I'm not supposed to say that. I'm supposed to claim there are lots of ways. There are many paths. But I didn't say Jesus is the way—Jesus did. And the reason we listen to Him is He is the One who came from God to us. Did you get that? If He came from God to us, He must be the One who knows the way back, from us to God. Make sense? He left His throne in heaven, came to earth, and says, “I can take you back.” I am trusting Him to do that. Nobody else has done that.

In Galatians 5 Paul is beginning to wrap it up, to hammer home his argument. He says that “Christ has liberated us to be free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery” (v. 1).

Why were we liberated?

For freedom. To be able to live as a free man and a free woman in Christ—beholden to nothing. Paul explains that he has learned to be content in everything. Despite the situation, he remains a free man, not beholden to anything. Standing firm. Not submitting (see Phil. 4:11-13).

What is it that motivates you to stand firm, not submitting to the thing that is trying to control you?

**Is there truth you remind yourself of that helps you through these times?
If so, what is it?**

You were released from bondage by the resurrection of Christ to live a free life in the resurrection that He brings to you. Don't give it away for the false security of slavery again. Yet this happened over and over again to God's people.

Look in the Old Testament. God brought Israel out of Egypt, into the promised land. Then right after Joshua died, they were slaves again. Read the stories in the Book of Judges. Joshua dies, the people forget who God is, and God allows them again to be carried away into slavery. One generation forgets all that God has done, and now they're slaves again.

But these stories didn't just happen in Old Testament times. It may take different forms, but it's still happening to God's people today.

CONSEQUENCES

Responsibility leads to choices. Choices lead to consequences. Now let's not panic. There are good consequences, and there are bad consequences. And even some of the bad ones aren't really bad. Also, every bad choice isn't a sin. If you're learning to ride a bicycle and you fall over, that's not a sin. This happens in life. Sometimes it's not sin—you just make a bad choice. But sometimes it is sin.

There are consequences to choices, and with consequences comes pressure. What if I make the wrong choice? Or worse, what if I make the right one? How do I handle failure? What are my family and friends going to think? What about next time?

That pressure can lead to many different questions and concerns. And the anxiety from it all can create a huge hole in your heart. It's a hole that hurts a lot. It can cause you to act in all manner of ways.

- Failure can cause you to act out of anger.
- Failure can cause you to act out of resentment.
- Failure can cause you to be bitter.

And everyone has this. No one gets through life without it. All of us have been wounded. All of us have been rejected. All of us have been betrayed. All of us have been let down. We all carry these wounds, no exceptions.

How do you handle pressure? What about failure?

On the continuum below, record where you typically find your acceptance.

Needing continual approval from others

Constant recognition of acceptance in Christ.



What wound is present in your life because of rejection or betrayal?

So how do you deal with it? Here's where it gets dicey. If I'm going to deal with it in the freedom Christ has given to me, it may hurt worse before it gets better. When I ask Jesus to help me with a problem, I want Him to grab me and throw me on the other side of it. I want to look back and say, *Whew. That was a close*

call. That's not what He does. He takes you right back to the problem, right back to the place it happened. And you begin to deal with it, little bit by little bit, but not by yourself—He's always there with you. The good thing about Jesus and the resurrection is that He's not bound by space or time, so He can go back to the past where you were hurt and take you with Him so you can understand it better. You'll be able to think through it, and hopefully get to the place where you say one of the following:

- This is my fault. I take responsibility and ask forgiveness for this.
- This was not my fault. I'm releasing it. I'm not going to carry it.
- This was true and I'm going to learn from it.
- This was not true and I'm rejecting it.

It's a slow, painful process, but it's the only redemptive way to deal with it. Why? So you're never afraid of it again. If Jesus grabs you and throws you on the other side of it, then you'll be afraid it will catch you later—that somehow you'll wake up and it's in your closet, ready to scare you once again. You'll always be afraid.

Read through the following passages and record how each addresses your fears and anxieties.

Isaiah 41:10

Hebrews 4:14-16

1 Peter 5:6-7

1 John 4:18

When Jesus walks you back through it in the power of the resurrection, you face it, deal with it, and He gives you victory over it. You won't be afraid of it anymore. When it rears its head or when someone brings it up, you can own it.

Someone may walk up to me and say, "Hey, I heard some things about you when you were in college, Mike."

"Yeah, you probably did."

"Were you the guy who ... ?"

"Yes I was. Not proud of it, but that was me."

So I deal with it. I'm not proud of it, but that was me. And I don't have to be afraid of it, because if Jesus isn't holding my sins against me, it doesn't matter who else is. You get that? Jesus looks at me and says, "We've talked about that. OK? It's over."

But for some reason we don't like that because we don't think it's enough—so we pick a drug. Now this drug can be porn, cocaine, alcohol, sex; you name it. There are all kinds of addictions, and you might be thinking, "Hey, that's mine." All of these are what we call the "drug of choice." It could be anything. And their control over us operates in similar ways.

We call pornography an addiction because your brain reacts the same way that it does when you ingest cocaine. The same kind of feel-good endorphins in your brain are released. This helps you feel better about yourself. That's why you get hooked on it, because you want to create that good feeling again and again and again and again, to the point that you will reject a real relationship for the illusion of pornography. All these drugs do the same thing. They are all diseases.

A DISEASE

The reason we call addiction a disease is because it has a predictable course. We know what's going to happen. We know the drug will begin to pull you

away from your relationships. You will walk away from people who don't help you use your drug. You'll sacrifice your education, your job, your friends, your marriage, and your children for your addiction. This is what addiction does.

But that's not the end of it. It takes more and more of the drug to keep you high and the pain off of your mind. It doesn't matter what drug it is—cocaine, alcohol, pornography—they all eventually stop working and it takes more and more “medication” to keep the pain away. The only thing that matters now is getting your next drug. And you know all of those lines you said you wouldn't cross? You will eventually.

Have you ever crossed the line, doing something completely irrational, just to medicate your pain? If so, what led you to that point?

Did you feel in control of the situation or more like the situation was controlling you? Explain.

You might say, “Oh. Hold on, Mike. I'm in control of this. I won't ever cross that line.”

Yes you will.

The pain will drive you to more and more medication. And eventually you'll go to rehab. You'll go through detox and you'll start feeling better. Once the drug gets out of your system, guess what? All this pain you've been trying to avoid—it's waiting right there for you. Now, not only do you have to deal with the pain but also the damage caused by your addiction.

PAUL'S PLEA

Paul wrote some pretty important stuff in Philippians. What about this passage?

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

You've heard this. It's one of those passages we hear but never really listen to. Read it again.

So how do you deal with worry? How do you deal with all the painful and unanswered questions? By understanding that Christ is your Savior, because He is your Lord. He is your friend, your High Priest, your big brother, the oldest member of your family. You belong to Him, and He belongs to you. You will be anxious about nothing. If you fill your life with Jesus, anxiety and pain is pushed out.

The thing I love about Paul is he always deals with real life. People talk about him being a theologian or a writer—he's a pastor. He's always dealing with real people in real life situations. So here's what he says for you to do. "Don't worry about anything." But what do I do with the anxiety?

Paul says, "Everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

Here's where most of us fail. We rank stuff in your lives by what we can handle and what we think Jesus should handle. There are things we pray about and there are things we just do. I know Paul said pray about everything, but that had to be an exaggeration. Right? We would never get anything done.

Sure, Paul is using hyperbole here, but not as much as you might think. Too many of us look at things in our lives and say we don't need to pray about this

or that, and then we get into trouble. Remember, Paul also says to pray without ceasing (see 1 Thess. 5:17). Our prayer doesn't end with "amen" in the morning. We have the privilege of being in conversation with Jesus throughout the day. If He knows the number of hairs on our heads, then there's no detail that's too small to be part of our prayer lives. We are in constant conversation with Jesus, all day long, about every aspect of our lives. Everything is under His lordship and belongs to Him. That means we should be talking to Jesus about it.

How much conversation with Christ do you have throughout the day?

What distractions draw your attention away from your Savior?

Paul's plea also means we need to be studying Scripture. Paul tells us to dwell on those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable (see Phil. 4:8). We need to know as much as we can about Jesus and fill our minds and hearts with a scriptural vision of Christ. From that vision, we need to add to our lives those things Jesus has in His life that we don't have in ours. On the other hand, we need to get rid of those things in our lives we have that aren't part of Jesus' life. In several places in his letters, Paul talks about putting off the old self of the flesh and putting on the new self in Christ (see Eph. 4:22-24). This is the process of daily dying to ourselves and coming alive in Christ. And this is exactly what Christ demands of us in order to be His followers.

Jesus described this very idea to His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew:

If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it. What will it benefit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?

Matthew 16:24-26

What does it mean to take up your cross?

To take up your cross means to put yourself in the place of a condemned criminal. But not just any condemned criminal—Jesus. He is saying “If I died, then you did too. To be My disciple, identify with My cross. And when you do this, you are identifying with Me and I with you.”

You’re a condemned criminal in the court of God. You are guilty of treason. You are guilty of abandoning the God who made you and loves you. You are guilty of infidelity. You cheated on the One who loves you more than you can understand. So graciously, Christ comes to you asking you to die to yourself and to the things that are preventing you from identifying with Him.

See the way we deal with our fears, pains, and anxieties is to first identify ourselves with Christ.

HEALING PROCESS

We also deal with our fears, pains, and anxieties by allowing Jesus to heal them through prayer, Bible study, worship, and fellowship with other believers. Now, I know that sounds simplistic, but in reality it’s not. Our time in prayer is a time of honest self-appraisal, going over the things in our lives that we’re doing well, not doing well, things we’re struggling with, and things we’re afraid

of. There's a strength that comes from our confession in the presence of the Savior who died for us. Words can't really explain the strength that comes from this kind of prayer.

Reading in Scripture the promises of Christ and seeing how He dealt with His disciples gives us confidence to live faithfully through the challenges of our lives.

Again in Philippians, Paul writes about the peace of God. We think of peace as the absence of war. In the Bible, peace means wholeness—completeness—finished. We're at peace. We're complete.

Paul writes that God will send His peace to surround and to equip our hearts. He will send the troops of peace to occupy our hearts, so that when anxiety attacks, it will be the peace of God that fights it back.

That's a different kind of peace, isn't it? This peace of God defends, attacks, and pushes back anxiety. It will guard our hearts, so that we're not anxious in our desires. And it will guard our minds, so we're not anxious in our thoughts. We won't have to hide the pain again in some addiction that could take over our lives.

What kinds of protection can you set up now to prepare and guard your heart against Satan's attacks?

Does this sense of peace give you a feeling of freedom? Why or why not?

Addiction is easy. You become a slave. You don't have to make any decisions if you're a slave. The decisions are made for you. Somebody else owns you. Somebody else tells you what to do. Somebody else tells you when to get up. Somebody else tells you when to go to bed. Somebody else tells you what to do all day.

But you weren't created to be that way or live that way. It's for freedom that you were set free. And right now, God is calling you to that free life. Now all of us are on this scale somewhere. You may think, *Well, thank God I'm not like that guy who's on Death Row or in rehab.* But all of us are dealing with anxiety in some kind of way, and a lot of us are dealing with it in unhealthy ways.

Perhaps this is the thing you've been afraid of most of all, that somehow you'd be caught, somehow you'd be ambushed, and you'd have to face it. Maybe for you, this is a bad place, because you're remembering the betrayal, the rejection, the failure, and how worthless you felt.

Maybe all that pain is very real to you today. In fact, you may be fighting the need to find your drug of choice. And you may already be thinking of getting a drink, shooting a line, or getting on the website *www.messmylifeupbeyondall-recognition.com*. Maybe you're thinking, *If I could just get out of here, I won't ever have to deal with it.*

But sooner or later you'll have to deal with it. Jesus died to give you your freedom. He doesn't want you to be a slave to anything. You're created and called to live in His freedom. Right now, Jesus wants you to be free from everything and to live "beholden" to nothing. He wants to bring healing to your heart, and peace to your anxieties. He is Lord. He is King, and He wants His people to live free.