

Conquering Sinful Habits

1) I'm struggling with a sinful habit that I haven't been able to conquer. Is there hope for me?

A) The Bible is clear that you can have victory over sinful habits! Consider what Paul told the Corinthians:

(1) "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13B).

B) This verse contains several encouraging truths:

(1) You are not alone. Satan will tell you that you're the only person who struggles with temptation. Nothing could be further from the truth. All believers deal with the same kinds of temptations, and even Jesus was tempted. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

(2) You are able to resist. God is faithful. He will not allow you to face a temptation that is beyond your ability to resist. Satan will tell you that the habit you're struggling with can't be overcome. He will tell you that past defeat equals future failure. Don't believe him! He's lying to you. Instead, believe what Paul said: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

(3) You are able to endure. Trials and temptations can't be brushed aside. Their purpose is to build character and spiritual muscle. You may want God to simply take your temptations away, but that won't help you in the long run. God's "way of escape" is found through the effort of endurance.

2) What is the biblical method for conquering sinful habits?

A) The first step to victory over a sinful habit is to examine your thinking and ask God to reveal any lies that Satan may have planted in your mind. Consider the following lies that people believe about conquering sinful habits:

(1) *I can conquer this habit on my own*. There's nothing Satan likes better than for you to try to live a godly life in your own strength. Jesus told his disciples, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

(2) *I've failed so many times. I'll never be free from this sinful habit*. If Satan can convince you of this, he's got you beat. James said, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Remember this: life is a series of choices. At each decision point, you have the ability, through God's grace, to choose to do what is right. A life of victory is lived one decision at a time (Romans 6:7, 11, 14, 17-18; 8:37; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

(3) It's OK if I have one bad habit—after all, nobody's perfect. This is one of Satan's favorite lies. If you allow Satan to have one stronghold in your life, sin will inevitably spread to other areas (1 Corinthians 5:6). Peter said, "As the one who called you is holy, you yourselves be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).

B) The next step to victory is to recognize the magnitude of what is at stake—this is a battle for your soul. Remember Charles Dickens' story called *A Christmas Carol*? The main character, Scrooge, was consumed by selfishness and greed, yet all that changed in a single night. How? Three spirits visited Scrooge and made him think about three important questions:

- What have I lost in the past because of this sinful habit?
- What am I losing right now because of this sinful habit?
- What will I lose in the future because of this sinful habit?

Use the "Scrooge Principle for Conquering Sinful Habits" handout and answer these three questions for yourself. Review your answers on a regular basis so you can be reminded of the importance of obedience. Jesus once asked, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

C) The next step to victory is to examine your life and remove anything that triggers your area of weakness. Break off contact with anyone who would draw you back into sinful behavior. Paul said, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14).

- (1) If you struggle with pornography, get an internet filter and give the password to your spouse. If this is not enough, get rid of your internet connection completely (iPhones, iPads, etc.).
- (2) If you struggle with gluttony, stop buying junk food. Go through the kitchen/refrigerator and remove anything that you shouldn't be eating.
- (3) If you struggle with smoking, get rid of your cigarettes and avoid any store where you regularly purchased them.
- (4) If you struggle with anger or worry, give your time, money and possessions to God. Release your right of ownership and commit to trusting Him for your needs. Identify your emotional triggers and preempt them where possible.
- (5) If you struggle with lust, get rid of anything that stimulates lustful thinking—TV, DVDs, magazines, etc.

D) The next step to victory is to renew your mind by memorizing and meditating on Scripture. The power of God's Word to conquer sinful habits is emphasized in Psalm 119: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:9–11). You can learn more about how to do this in the lesson called "The Fifth Essential—Memorizing and Meditating on Scripture." Consider the following plan a "prescription" for curing sinful habits:

- (1) Find Bible verses that relate to your area of temptation. Write these down on 3x5 cards and use them each day. Along with the verse, write down a prayer that reflects the truth of the verse. For example, suppose you are struggling with worry:
 - (a) Write down what Jesus said: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Matthew 6:30–31).
 - (b) A prayer that reflects this truth is: “Father, you told me that you care for something as temporary and trivial as the grass of the field. How much more do you care for me! I believe what you said, and I purpose, through your grace, to stop worrying and trust you for the future.”
 - (2) In the morning, read your memory card(s) and pray before you begin your day. Ask God to give you His grace (the desire and power to do His will) and help you resist temptation until lunch time. Throughout the morning, meditate on the truth of the Scriptures you memorized.
 - (a) It is important to understand that you “grow” in grace. This means that every time you resist temptation and choose to obey, your desire and will to do right grows. When you yield to temptation, you resist God’s grace and your desire and will to do right shrinks (Hebrews 12:15).
 - (3) At lunch time, repeat the process. Ask God to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until dinner time.
 - (4) At dinner time, repeat the process. Ask God to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until bed time.
 - (5) At bed time, review your day: Did you say ‘No!’ to the devil and resist temptation? If you failed, ask God to forgive you and determine to obey tomorrow. Read over your verse(s) and ask God to guard your mind while you sleep. The best thing to have on your mind as you go to sleep is God’s Word.
 - (6) Commit to following this “prescription” for at least 30 days (60 days is even better).
- E) The last step to victory is to find a fellow Christian to whom you can be accountable. Humble yourself and confess your sin to them (Proverbs 28:13; James 5:16). Ask them to enter into a commitment of accountability with you. This means that they will ask you each week (or each day) whether or not you have resisted temptation in a specific area. This commitment will give you added motivation to resist the Devil. You are not meant to live the Christian life apart from the help and encouragement of the church. That’s why accountability to other believers is so important (cf. Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:23–25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 6:1–2).
- (1) Select this person with care. They should be mature in the faith and respected as a person of integrity by other Christians. They should be someone you would

never think of deceiving, and the thought of telling them that you have sinned should be embarrassing enough to help motivate you to resist temptation. They should also be someone that you can call during the week if you're really struggling with temptation.

3) Some people are freed from their sinful habits when they are saved, while others are not. Why?

- A) We began this lesson by looking at 1 Corinthians 10:13 in which God promises that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to resist. When certain people are saved, God supernaturally removes all desire for the sinful habit(s) they had as a sinner. He does this because He knows it is necessary for them. They have so damaged their will that they are not able to handle temptation in that area.
- B) When you hear about someone who has experienced miraculous deliverance from a sinful habit, it's easy to be discouraged about your own struggles. But remember this: a person who experiences miraculous deliverance in one or two areas of life does not experience deliverance from temptation in every other area of life. Just because they no longer struggle with cocaine or alcohol addiction doesn't mean they never struggle with anger or lust. In other areas of temptation they must do exactly what you do—resist the Devil and say 'No!' to temptation.