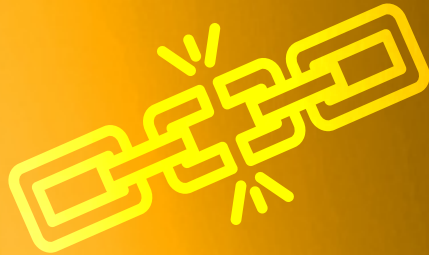


FACING YOUR GIANTS



FACING THE GIANT OF

ADDICTION

UCB UNITED
CHRISTIAN
BROADCASTERS



FACING THE GIANT OF **ADDICTION**

Addictions of any kind can be very difficult to conquer.

Left unchecked, addictions can destroy relationships, lives and communities. The good news is that with the right support from professionals and with God's strength, addictions can be overcome. With that support and through His Word, by His Spirit and together with His people, freedom from addiction is available for you, starting today.

The *Facing Your Giants* series is designed to help people like you find God's help in dealing with the challenges that face us all.

Contained in these little booklets are big truths from God's Word, guidance on how to pray, and practical suggestions for change. There are 28 readings from Bob Gass, author of the UCB Word For Today, to help you practise new thought patterns and habits day by day for a month. As the Bible says, 'he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4 ESV). With the help of our great God, you can face any giant in front of you.

My prayer is that as you read this book, you will begin to see 'light at the end of the tunnel' and will experience the type of freedom that only God can bring.

Every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in orange ink, appearing to read 'David L'Herroux'.

David L'Herroux - Chief Executive, United Christian Broadcasters

P.S. If working your way through this booklet raises any issues and you would like prayer, please do contact UCB Prayerline. You can find out more at ucb.co.uk/pray or ring us on 01782 363 000

DAY 1

Cut the cord

'On the day you were born your cord was not cut.'

Ezekiel 16:4 NIV

Are you still tied to the things of your past? Are you still being fed emotionally by relationships that need to be severed? You'll only cut the cord when you realise that you can get what you need from a better source. Paul speaks of 'his power that is at work within us' (Ephesians 3:20 NIV). What is that power? It's the God-given ability to cut the cord that ties you to the old mud-holes of yesterday. If a pig and a sheep fall into the same mud, one will wallow and the other will try to get out. That's because their natures are different. Whether you fell into the mud or were dragged back into it is not the issue. Your new nature won't let you stay there. It'll cry, 'I don't belong here! I want to get out! Help me Lord!' 'But I've really blown it this time!' you say. Listen to these words from a man whose failures make yours look like charitable deeds: 'When I kept it all inside...the pressure never let up...then I let it all out; I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to God."' Suddenly the pressure was gone – my guilt dissolved, my sin disappeared' (Psalm 32:3-5 MSG). Pronounce 'the last rites' over your failures, forgive those who've hurt you, cut the cord that connects you to the past, and start moving forward.

PRAYER POINT

Father, I come to You today with an open heart. I admit that I am not perfect and have many failings; I don't want to live a lie anymore, where I portray myself as one thing but live a life inside of me that's quite different. Lord, I want to live an honest life before You; help me come to a place of peace where secrecy and stress are things of the past, in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2

You're a work in progress!

'Until we all...become mature.'

Ephesians 4:13 NIV

Birth and growth are different processes, both naturally and spiritually. There's a big difference between being saved and being whole. One happens instantly, the other is the work of a lifetime. When God saves you, your spirit is immediately changed but your emotions, your appetites and your attitudes still need working on. In each of us there are things that need to be healed, and until they are, we struggle with them. What are those areas in your life? Are you dealing with them? Those who tell you, 'If you were really a Christian you wouldn't act like that,' forget that falling down is just a part of learning to walk. You can know what to do, yet struggle to do it. Sin is not necessarily the problem; sometimes it's how we medicate the problem. For example, we go out looking for intimacy and end up with sex, or go out looking for peace and come home with a bottle of alcohol. And all the while, our real needs are never addressed. The answer cannot be found in people or things, it can only be found in a relationship with God! Real peace comes when you turn to Him in your weakness and allow Him to do for you what nobody else can. Only He can regenerate your spirit. Only He can satisfy your emotions. Only He can bring you to the place of maturity and wholeness. Why don't you come to Him today?

DAY 3

Don't be undermined

'Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV

God told his people, 'If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble' (Numbers 33:55 NIV). Was God being uncharitable? No, He just understood that if His people hung out with the Canaanites, they'd pick up their habits, seek their approval, live by their values and end up worshipping their gods! That's why He laid down His law so clearly! John Maxwell says, 'You'll acquire the vices and virtues of your closest associates. The fragrance of their lives will pervade yours.' He's right! You can tell yourself that a bad relationship won't hurt you; or that your good will rub off on them. But who are you kidding? If you put on a pair of white gloves, go into your back yard and pick up dirt, the dirt won't get clean, but the gloves will definitely get dirty. Right? Wake up! A toxic relationship is like a malignant cancer cell – if left unchecked, it'll rob you of your health, and maybe even your life. Miguel de Cervantes, who wrote *Don Quixote*, said, 'Tell me your company, and I'll tell you who you are.' Take another look at the influences in your life today, for they're doing two things: a) moulding you, and b) motivating you. If a constant drip can wear away a stone, then the wrong influences can undermine you little by little. But you are not a stone: you can move!

PRAYER POINT

Lord, I pray that You would help me to develop a Godly character and start to live my life according to Your principles and not mine. Lord, I often refuse help or advice because I think I know best but today I break that stubbornness in Jesus' name and pray that I live life on Your terms and not mine. Put around me friends that build me up not pull me down. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 4

The danger of little things

'Catch...the little foxes that ruin the vineyards.'

Song of Solomon 2:15 NIV

On Colorado's long peak lie the remains of giant 400-year-old tree. Age, storms, and avalanches couldn't bring it down. What did? A tiny beetle you could crush under your foot. It ate right through the bark and devoured its heart. Be careful: it's the little foxes that ruin the vineyards. Little attitudes – but if you practise them often enough, they become fixed attitudes. Little indulgences – but if you give place to them long enough, they desensitise you to sin. Remember when certain things bothered you? Now you don't give them a second thought. You're being desensitised! Every alcoholic started by telling himself, 'I can handle it.' Every victim of internet pornography (and they're getting younger every day) started with a look, got hooked on a fantasy, and ended up releasing a tiger that: a) can devour them, and b) will never willingly go back into its cage. Before a moral problem got out of hand in the Corinthian church, Paul hit it on the head. Listen: 'I also received a report...One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother. And you're so above it all that it doesn't even faze you...You pass it off as a small thing, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a "small thing," but it works its way through a whole batch of bread dough...get rid of this "yeast"' (1 Corinthians 5:1-7MSG). Strong language! Why does God make such a big deal out of this anyway? Because sin hurts us, and anything that hurts one of His children, makes Him angry.

DAY 5

The need to change

'You know these things – now do them. That is the path of blessing.'

John 13:17 TLB

There's an old Irish proverb that says, 'A bad habit's like a warm bed; easy to get into, but hard to get out of.' What are the habits you need to get into or out of? If you want to know where you'll be a year from now, check your daily routine. Change doesn't happen because of what you know; it happens because of what you do daily. James writes, 'Don't fool yourself...letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear...whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God...and sticks with it...will find delight' (James 1:22-25 MSG). What do you want at this time? Better health? A better marriage? A better prayer life? A better income? Unless a rich relative dies or you get an email from heaven telling you otherwise, you're going to have to: a) seek God, set down some written goals, and keep them before you constantly; b) devise a step-by-step plan for reaching them; c) stop time-wasting and start calling for more accountability from yourself; d) push, persist and persevere! Thomas Edison said, 'Opportunity is missed by most people because it comes dressed up in overalls, and looks like work'; and e) submit 'all of the above' to God for His approval, then make a start. Otherwise we'll be having this same conversation at this time next year. Jesus said, 'You know these things – now do them. That is the path of blessing' (John 13:17 TLB).

PRAYER POINT

I pray today, Lord, that You highlight the areas of my life that need to be brought in line with Your will. I desire to live a life of purpose and a life of complete fulfilment in You and pray that I can, with Your help, achieve all You have promised for me. Help me to be determined and focused to fulfil Your high calling for my life. Amen.

DAY 6

The need for repentance

'Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted.'

2 Corinthians 7:10 NKJV

There's a difference between *confessing* your sin and *repenting* of it. In Scripture, the word 'repentance' means 'to turn away from sin'. By confessing your sin you acknowledge what you have done; by repenting you turn away from it. And the good news is that there's no limit to God's forgiveness. The moment you ask for it, you receive it. However, God doesn't intend you to keep repeating your sinful patterns over and over again. That's where 'godly sorrow' comes in. Paul writes, 'You sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you' (v. 11 NKJV). The purpose of godly sorrow is to make you more diligent when it comes to changing behaviour. When you allow sin into your life, you violate your core of righteousness. 'For [God]... made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2 Corinthians 5:21 KJV). At the point of salvation God literally *made you* 'the righteousness of God in Christ'. You're a regenerated spirit living in an unregenerated body, and when you permit sin into your life, it violates the very core of who you are! And that will cause you godly sorrow, leading to repentance and turning away from sin. Don't settle for saying, 'This is a habit I can't break. But it's okay because God will forgive me.' Yes, He will forgive you, but He doesn't want you to settle for a cycle of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and then repeating the same sin. He wants you to be strong and effective in His service. That's why He's calling you to a higher level.

DAY 7

God accepts you 'in Christ', so accept yourself

'God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good... and He approved it completely.'

Genesis 1:31 AMPC

You can't deal with anything effectively until you first accept it for what it is – including yourself! Dictionary definitions for 'accept' include: 1) to receive willingly; 2) to view as right; 3) to agree with. First, acceptance involves your will. You can choose to accept yourself or not; it's up to you. Second, when something is acceptable it's viewed as being 'right'. We tend to reject ourselves because we see only what's wrong with us, rarely what's right. Often this attitude was instilled in us early in life by those who focused on our weaknesses instead of our strengths, and we still carry their opinions with us. Third, the word 'accept' means 'to agree with'. If you're having a problem accepting yourself, you need to get into agreement with God's Word. He says you're 'righteous', so start saying the same thing (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). That can take a while to sink in, but over time it will take root within you. The Bible says, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3 KJV). To walk with God you must agree with Him. He says He loves you and accepts you 'in Christ', so start to agree with Him and stop putting yourself down. When God made us, He said, 'It was very good' and He hasn't changed His mind. But be patient – He's not through with His creative work in your life. And He wants you to see yourself as He sees you and learn to love yourself while you're still 'under construction'.

PRAYER POINT

Lord, I know I'm a work-in-progress, and I thank You that You don't reject me because of my flaws and failings, but instead You accept and love me as I am. Help me to accept Your corrections as You work within me. When I'm tempted to wander away from You or do something that goes against Your will, please fill me with Your strength so I can turn away from it and keep my integrity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 8

Live a life of integrity

'The integrity of the upright will guide them.'

Proverbs 11:3 NKJV

After leading the Nation of Israel for forty years, the prophet Samuel didn't get a retirement party and a gold watch. He got something much better in the form of this commendation: 'You have not cheated or oppressed us' (1 Samuel 12:4 NIV). He led them, instructed them, and blessed them, but not one time did he take advantage of them. How refreshing! How remarkable – particularly in today's world of business and politics. C.S. Lewis said, 'Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make a man a more clever devil.' So before you set your goals, determine your values. Values are like guard rails on the motorway; they keep you from veering off the road and over the edge. They determine how far you'll go on questionable issues. Knowing what matters and what you truly value is the key to living a life of meaning and purpose. For most of us the problem isn't *having* values, the problem is *living* them out. We all value honesty, integrity, and forgiveness, but when we're pressed, do we really live them out – especially when it costs us? Pursuing a life of values comes with a price. But what we get in exchange is the ability to hold our head high during the day and sleep well at night. And perhaps just as important – it allows us to relax and be ourselves. The mental toll of cheating, lying, and stealing is draining. Trying to remember the lie you told someone last week, so that today's lie will match up, can literally wear you out. When you live a life of integrity, you don't have to worry about such things!

DAY 9

Hey, wise up!

'Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.'

Romans 13:14 NKJV

Johnny Cash sang 'I keep a close watch on this heart of mine; I keep my eyes wide open all the time'. Good song; even better theology! Insanity is doing the crazy stuff others do, hoping for a better result. Wise up! David messed around with another man's wife and ended up with a blighted conscience, a ruined reputation, and two shattered families. Run while you still can! Sound old fashioned? Try talking to some of the people you thought 'got away with it'. They paid in ways they don't like to talk about. Such as: 1) *Fear*: 'What the wicked dread will overtake them' (Proverbs 10:24 NIV). 2) *Lack of confidence*: 'If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God' (1 John 3:21 NIV). 3) *Regret*: 'I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly' (1 Samuel 26:21 KJV). Solomon had it all; a home that took 13 years to build, 40,000 stables for his horses, a fleet of ships, a thousand beautiful women, and more money than he could spend in ten lifetimes. Yet he ended up turning his back on God and on the very advice he gave others. Why? Because he lacked personal discipline! Here's how he sums up his life in the book of Ecclesiastes: a) 'I denied myself nothing' (2:10 NIV), b) 'I hated all the things I had toiled for' (2:18 NIV), c) 'Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning' (4:13 NIV). Hey, wise up!

PRAYER POINT

Lord, help me to be more disciplined in my Christian walk. Forgive me, Lord, when things are busy and I haven't prayed or read Your Word. Let that be what I cling to in the busy times to find strength and fulfilment. Help me realise, Lord, that I don't know best; You do. In my times with You, let me hear Your still small voice and not dismiss it but act upon it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 10

You can't always trust your feelings

'The human heart is the most deceitful of all things.'

Jeremiah 17:9 NLT

We all know well-intentioned people, who, when you ask them to do something, you're not sure they will follow through. As nice as they are, they're unreliable. Your feelings are like that; much of the time you can't count on them because they're not attuned to what's best for you. They're more interested in having their own way. For example, our feelings can get us excited about going shopping when we don't have the money to spend. They entice us to eat cheesecake when we're trying to avoid extra calories. They lead us to stay up late at night working or watching TV, when we know we need to get up early the next day. In short, our feelings are fickle. They change like the wind. Yet it's amazing how much power we give them in our lives. As believers, we have something wiser and more dependable to rely on than our feelings, and that's the Word of God. When we feel strongly about something, it's not always easy to determine whether or not we're in agreement with God about it. Jeremiah tells us, 'The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows...it? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives' (vv. 9-10 NLT). And He does it through His Word, which 'is sharper than any two-edged sword...*exposing...sifting...analysing* and *judging* the very thoughts and purposes of the heart' (Hebrews 4:12 AMPC). Here's the score: if you're truly interested in rising above your feelings, you'll let the Word of God be the determining factor in all your decisions.

DAY 11

Breaking habits

'The weapons we fight with...have divine power to demolish strongholds.'

2 Corinthians 10:4 NIV

We all struggle with habits – what's yours? Be honest! For many of us it's our attitude that keeps us from growing, excelling and soaring to the heights God planned for us (see Psalm 139:23-24). Bad habits are ways of thinking and acting that become part of our everyday lives; ways of trying to meet a need or fill a void. They're like crutches we use to get through life. When a habit takes control of us, the Bible calls it a 'stronghold' (it has a strong hold on us). Do you have a habit you want to be set free from? As long as you think you can break it in your own strength, nothing will change. By operating in your own power, you're disconnected from God's power. Jesus said, 'No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me' (John 15:4 NIV). You must come to the place where you make a conscious decision each day, and sometimes each hour, to turn your life and your will over to God. To pray, 'Lord, I don't have the ability to overcome this. I choose not to give in to it. Strengthen me now by Your Spirit' is a prayer God will answer, for He always empowers our choices when they line up with His will! Whatever you're struggling with today, remember, 'we...have divine power to demolish strongholds.'

PRAYER POINT

Lord, I'm going to focus on the most influential habit in my life and remove myself from its grip, in Jesus' name. I pray for Your help and guidance during the next few weeks as I break its stronghold in my life. Help me find a friend who I can be accountable to and I pray that You reveal encouragement to me in Your Word to keep fighting until this habit is overcome. Amen.

DAY 12

Power to quit

'Honour God with your body.'

1 Corinthians 6:20 NLT

Are you a smoker? If you are, the odds are stacked against you. 'But it's my life,' you say. No, listen: 'You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body' (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT). Why indulge in a habit you wouldn't recommend to others, or risk not living long enough to fulfil your life's purpose? And what about those who love and need you? A lady wrote to columnist Ann Landers saying, 'A few weeks ago we buried one of the dearest people I've ever known. He was married for 43 years to our eldest sister. We adored him. He was meticulous about detail, the perfect choice to take charge of any family project; dependable, industrious, thorough. Integrity was his middle name. But this man who did everything right, did one thing wrong. He smoked two packs a day for 30 years. This senseless addiction deprived him of the joy of seeing his grandchildren marry. It also denied us who loved him the pleasure of his beautiful presence. For God's sake, stop smoking. Do it for yourself and for the people who care about you.' Are you like the man who said, 'Quitting's easy; I've done it a thousand times'? That's because you've tried in your own strength. The Bible says, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God' (John 1:12 KJV). Make the choice, then turn to God and He'll supply the power to quit!

DAY 13

Everything you need is in God's Word

'If the Son sets you free, you are truly free.'

John 8:36 NLT

Sometimes we tell new believers to clean up their act, without telling them how! Jesus said, 'If the Son sets you free, you are truly free.' The Amplified Bible puts it like this: 'Then you are really and unquestionably free.' The key to victory in life doesn't lie in exercising more willpower, but in drawing on God's power moment by moment. Paul writes, 'Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh' (Galatians 5:16 NKJV). Lasting change comes from the inside out. Your biggest battle will always be in the area of your thoughts and impulses. If Satan can get your mind off God's Word and into the carnal realm, he can swing you towards sin and defeat every time. Understand this: God's Word is the language of God's Spirit. That means when you read it and meditate on its principles, you are allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you, and as a result you can keep your flesh under control. But when you dwell on sinful thoughts, you're operating in the enemy's language and letting him dictate to you. So get back into God's Word today. It's 'the sword of the Spirit' and the only weapon sharp enough to cut you loose from sin. Peter says, 'By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life...he has given us great and precious promises...[so we can] share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption' (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT). Everything you need is in God's Word.

PRAYER POINT

Help me, Lord, to stop living in denial and admit to You the areas of my life where lust takes control. Father, I want to break free of this, I want to live a clean thought-life. I pray that from today, Your Holy Spirit would bring a sense of conviction over me every time I fall into this temptation so I would look away and focus on You.

DAY 14

Defences against lust

'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully.'

Job 31:1 NIV

To win the battle against lust, you must decide once and for all to be fully committed to God. Steve Arterburn says that means establishing three perimeters of defence: 1) *Your eyes*. Job said, 'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully.' It's the lingering look that opens the door to trouble. Before David messed up with Bathsheba, we read that he: a) saw, b) inquired, and c) took. Train yourself to pull your eyes away immediately. What you're looking at isn't yours. God says, 'Leave it alone.' 2) *Your mind*. Paul writes, 'Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). Does your mind traffic in double-entendres, daydreams, the internet, magazines, movies, and anything else that can alter your mood at a glance? Replace these things with memorised Scriptures and mental images of your best moments with your mate. It'll work! With your transformed mind actively policing itself and capturing rogue thoughts before they capture you, your defences will begin to grow strong. 3) *Your heart*. Listen: 'Above all...guard your heart' (Proverbs 4:23 NIV). Work on strengthening the bond with your mate. Begin to repay the debt you owe from the times you neither honoured nor cherished them. Decide to love, even though you don't 'feel' like it and watch yourself become their biggest fan. No matter how badly you've failed, victory can be yours if you're willing to humble yourself; ask for God's help and make a covenant with your eyes, your mind and your heart, to live in purity!

DAY 15

It's a process

'Unwrap him and let him go!'

John 11:44 NLT

Whenever you accept Christ, He changes you from the inside out. But certain experiences in your past can slow you down, keep you bound, and determine how you see yourself. While the Holy Spirit does the initial work, transformation is a process. It doesn't happen overnight; it takes time. When Jesus stood at His friend's grave and called, 'Lazarus, come forth', His friend who'd been dead for four days shuffled out, still bound from head to toe like a mummy. Notice, his old grave clothes, which were a major hindrance to him, didn't just fall off the minute Jesus called him. No, Jesus told his friends, 'Unwrap him and let him go!', and with their help, Lazarus was freed to pursue a new life. The Bible says, 'anyone...in Christ...is a new creation; the old has passed away... the new has come!' (2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV). When Jesus saves you, you emerge from the tomb wrapped in the grave clothes of your past. What past? a) negative influences and thought patterns, b) low self-esteem, c) old addictions and habits, or d) destructive relationships. That's why God sends people to love you, unwrap you and release you into your potential. It's important that you identify these relationships and build your life around them. It's also why you need to develop an intimate relationship with God through prayer and Bible reading. Through His Word you get an accurate picture of how He sees you. Through prayer you get to know His heart and start seeing yourself through His eyes. When that happens, you'll never see yourself the same way again!

PRAYER POINT

Lord, I know that You're changing me from within, and that the process takes time. Please help me to have patience as You transform me from the inside out. When I'm feeling that things are just too much for me, or they're taking longer than I think they should, help me to meet them with prayer and worship instead of impatience and despair. Help me to see things from Your perspective, Lord, and trust in Your goodness and strength. Amen.

DAY 16

Worship your way through

'When he saw Jesus...he ran and worshipped Him.'

Mark 5:6 NKJV

Would you like to stop wrestling with so many issues? Then learn to worship your way through them! The Bible says that when the man with the unclean spirit 'saw Jesus...he...worshipped Him.' Note, this man did not get healed first and worship later. No, after he started worshipping he was set free. There's an important principle here: Paul says, 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...in heaven, and...on earth...and...confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2:10-11 NKJV), because even Satan has to acknowledge God's ability and willingness to change your situation. James says, 'even the demons believe – and tremble!' (James 2:19 NKJV). The Bible says, 'No weapon forged against you will prevail...This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD' (Isaiah 54:17 NIV). That includes anything that would rise up to destroy you and your family; old wounds, painful memories, addictions, past sins, they must all bow in submission when the Name of Jesus is lifted up in praise. Notice, when the man from the tombs began to worship, the forces of evil cried out, 'What business do you have, Jesus, Son of the High God, messing with me?' (Mark 5:7 MSG). The truth is Satan's hosts have nothing in common with Jesus; no association and no alliance. And the only business He has with them is to cast them out! David said, 'my head is lifted...above my enemies all around me...I will sing and make melody to the LORD' (Psalm 27:6 NRSV). Worship is one of the keys to your breakthrough. So run to Jesus today, fall at His feet and begin to worship your way through.

DAY 17

Living in God's approval

'We have been approved by God.'

1 Thessalonians 2:4 NKJV

Living in the approval of God is so liberating! It frees you from 'approval addiction' – worrying about what other people think. When you are addicted, no matter how much of your drug of choice you get, it's never enough; and like all addicts, you go crazy when your drug is withheld. Approval addicts are always at the mercy of other people's opinions. As a result their lives become an emotional rollercoaster of highs and lows. Paul was free to speak the truth in love: to confront people, or be gentle with them. When someone told Paul they didn't like him, he didn't lose sleep over it. That's because his life wasn't built upon their approval. Paul didn't go around needing to a) compare himself with others, b) demonstrate his superiority, c) impress or compete with others, or d) be the top dog or the one who's always in charge. Living in God's approval set him free from such ulcer-inducing anxiety, and meant he could enjoy the life God called him to live. When we're young and insecure we tend to worry about what others think of us, but as we become more mature, we realise that most of the time they weren't thinking about us at all. They were too busy worrying about what we thought of them! Living in God's approval frees us from all that stress. It gives us the strength to deal with criticism and conflict, because we know our identity. And our identity is this: we are God's redeemed children. And since we are accepted and approved by Him, what else matters?

PRAYER POINT

It's so tempting to compare myself to others and to strive for their approval. Lord, please help me to see myself as You see me, and to realise that I'm already living in Your approval. Thank You that You're the answer to every one of my problems. Help me to remember to turn to You whenever I feel alone or empty. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The 'But God' factor

'But God...hath raised us up.'

Ephesians 2:4-6 KJV

Ultimately, there's nothing that can fill the emptiness of the human heart – but God. There's no solution to war, prejudice, and injustice – but God. There's no satisfaction for the cravings of the flesh – but God. There's no healing for the broken-hearted, lonely and desperate – but God. There's no turning point for human depravity – but God. There's no deliverance from addiction and heartache – but God. The 'But God' factor breaks every generational curse that reaches you through Adam's sin. One Greek translation of the word 'spirit' is 'air'. When you were 'dead in trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:1 NKJV), God breathed divine air into you. Paul says, 'And you [He made alive], when you were dead (slain) by [your] trespasses and sins' (Ephesians 2:1 AMPC). The truth is, you never really lived until you met the Lord! The 'But God' factor turns tragedy into triumph. It is the turning point in your story. Hell would be partying today, 'but God' chose to lavish His mercy and grace on you. Listen: 'that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV). Rich in wisdom. Rich in achievements. Rich in relationships. Rich in 'all things'. Despite Satan's efforts to destroy, diminish, defame and discourage you, God never once took His hand off your life. He brought you to an understanding of Jesus as your Saviour and Lord; now He's raising you up to fulfil His purposes. No matter how bad things may look today, rise up and declare 'But God!'

Be careful who you turn to

'I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.'

Psalm 32:5 NIV

When you are struggling with a stubborn habit or addiction, you will find strength in the right support group. And when you need help, don't be ashamed to reach for it – but be careful to whom you confess your sins! The psalmist wrote, 'I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.' One Bible teacher put it like this: 'Never discuss what you want someone else to forget. Your words make thoughts permanent; they give life and longevity to everything discussed. Arguments would die and conflicts would cease, except your words sustained them. Words breathe life into everything. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Proverbs 18:21 KJV). And words can wound. "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 18:8 KJV). You can't stop others from talking about you, but don't give them information you may want them to forget. And never give unnecessary information that requires, demands, or inspires the pursuit of more questions. Be cautious when confessing your mistakes. Your attempt to be open may be very sincere, but your mistake may loom larger in their memory than the lesson you've learned and are trying to share with them. Certainly, there are times when additional information and clarification are advisable, beneficial, and even necessary, but you must be wise. Focus on your future, not your past. And never say anything you don't want to be repeated for the rest of your life.'

PRAYER POINT

Father, help me find a group of friends that I can confide in and who can confide in me. Help me not to be so 'standoffish' with others and trust people enough to open up my heart in friendship. I pray, Father, that You bless and encourage me in this, that as my friends are honest with me, I see that as an opportunity to grow in You. Shape me for the greater good Lord, Amen.

DAY 20

A fruitful life

'He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.'

John 15:2 NLT

Without regular pruning, a vine will live up to only a fraction of its potential. Vineyards have only one purpose – grapes! Energy spent on anything else, no matter how impressive, is wasted. Expert pruners have four things clearly in mind: a) removing anything that's dead or dying, b) making sure sunlight gets to all fruit-bearing branches, c) increasing the size and quality of the fruit, and d) encouraging new fruit to develop. To make room for the kind of abundance God created you for, He will begin cutting away the parts of your life that are draining precious time and energy from what's truly important. To accomplish this, He'll even risk your misunderstanding of His methods and motives. His purpose for you requires the cutting away of: bad habits and attitudes, wrong relationships, lesser priorities – anything that distracts from your highest calling. Are you praying for God's abundant blessings in your life? Are you asking Him to use you in His service? If so, you're asking for the shears! Pruning is how God answers such prayers! If you're being pruned today, follow these steps: a) pay attention – don't waste this season of preparation, and b) ask God whether you're being pruned for greater fruitfulness or disciplined because of sin; there's a difference. If it's sin, repent and get back on track. If your response to the pruning process is right, your rewards will be great.

DAY 21

You can bounce back

'Pursue...overtake...recover all.'

1 Samuel 30:8 NKJV

Are you battling a stubborn habit like drugs and alcohol? Gambling? Overeating? Pornography? Here's good news. Jesus said He came 'that captives will be released' (Luke 4:18 NLT). You can recover. You can get back what you've lost, or something better. How? By doing two things David did when the Amalekites destroyed his home and took his family captive: *1) He turned to God for strength.* 'David strengthened himself in the LORD' (1 Samuel 30:6 NKJV). Face it; if you could solve the problem yourself you'd have done it. Acknowledging your powerlessness is the first step to victory. But acknowledging it is not the same as giving in to defeat and despair. It means that *you* can't, but *God* can, and He will when you surrender to Him. *2) He turned to God for a strategy.* 'David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all"' (v. 8 NKJV). Note the word 'pursue'. David was relentless; he didn't stop until he recovered everything the enemy had stolen from him. And that must be your attitude too. You say, 'But I've failed so often.' The Bible says, 'Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again' (Proverbs 24:16 NIV). You say, 'How can I be righteous in God's eyes and keep falling?' Because your righteousness is not earned by your performance, it's transferred to you through Christ's performance on the cross (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). Knowing that will give you the faith and courage to 'pursue...overtake...and recover all' – and bounce back.

PRAYER POINT

Lord, I don't want to drag the past around with me any longer. No matter the hurt or pain, I release it to You today. Help me, Lord, to become the person You desire me to be and to resist the enemy reminding me of the failure I was. The old me is dead, the new me is flourishing in Jesus' name. Today is a new day, a fresh start, let me live a profound and blessed life. Amen.

DAY 22

God's recovery plan for you

'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.'

1 Samuel 30:8 NKJV

God's Word promises that whatever you are addicted to today, you can be set free from. And there's more! You can get back what you've lost, or something even better. How? By doing what David did when the Amalekite armies destroyed his home and took his family captive:

1) *He turned to God for strength to deal with his problem.* 'David strengthened himself in the LORD his God' (v. 6 NKJV). Face it; if you could have solved the problem by yourself, you'd already have done it, right? Don't feel bad about that, feel good. Acknowledging that you are powerless is the first step to victory. 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV).

Now, acknowledging that you're powerless isn't the same thing as giving in to hopelessness. It means acknowledging that you can't, God can, and that He will when you surrender the problem to Him.

2) *God gave David a plan to deal with his problem.* 'Pursue, for you will surely overtake them and without fail recover all.' Armed with God's strength and His plan, David went after the enemy and kept attacking until he recovered everything that had been stolen from him. And God wants to do that for you too. He promised, 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten' (Joel 2:25 KJV). When you turn to God, He can give you more joy and success in the years ahead than in all the years behind you. That's His recovery plan for you!

DAY 23

Getting a new wardrobe!

'If you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it.'

Colossians 3:1 MSG

Take a moment and read these words from Colossians 3 in The Message. Don't just read them once – meditate on them, digest them, then put them to work. 'Your old life is dead...that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God...It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk...You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it...So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it' (Colossians 3:3-14 MSG). Now go back and read those words again, asking God to help you make them a reality in your life today!

PRAYER POINT

I pray that today won't finish with a list of offences I've collected, Lord. I release to You anything the enemy would try and trap me with. Help me to live a life of forgiveness every day. Lord, help me to see You as the most important aspect of my life. Help me to focus on what You desire to see blossom in my daily walk. Let me focus on Your Kingdom, not mine. Amen.

DAY 24

Do what pleases God

'Do what is right.'

Psalm 4:5 NCV

Day after day Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he said no. He gave her no time, no attention, no chitchat, and no reason for hope. 'He did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her' (Genesis 39:10 NKJV). When she called, he didn't answer the phone. When she texted, he didn't text back. When she showed up, he 'fled and ran outside' (v. 12 NKJV). In a culture that uses phrases like 'consenting adults' and 'sexual rights', we forget how immorality destroys the lives of people who aren't in the bedroom. Max Lucado writes: 'Years ago a friend gave me this counsel: "Make a list of all the lives you would affect by your sexual immorality." I did. Every so often I reread it. "My wife Denalyn. My three daughters. My son-in-law. My yet-to-be-born granddaughter. Every person who has ever read one of my books or heard one of my sermons. My publishing team. Our church staff." The list reminds me: One act of carnality is a poor exchange for a lifetime of lost legacy.' Joseph's primary reason for saying no to Potiphar's wife was – God. 'How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' (v. 9 NKJV). The lesson we learn from Joseph is surprisingly simple: *do what pleases God*. When a friend offers you a joint of marijuana: *do what pleases God*. When your classmates show you a way to cheat: *do what pleases God*. When the temptation to watch pornography is great: *do what pleases God*. 'How can I please God?' you ask. 'Do what is right as a sacrifice to the LORD and trust the LORD.'

DAY 25

Replace bad habits with good ones

'O God...guide me on the road to eternal life.'

Psalm 139:23-24 MSG

Any habit you keep feeding will only strengthen its grip on your life. Ask a recovering alcoholic – they only change when they 'hit bottom'. Prodigals don't come home until they've lost everything (see Luke 15:32). But that doesn't have to be your story, for your Father is waiting to welcome you back now! Come on, you're a child of the Most High; captivity is unnatural for you! You'll never be free until you despise your chains. Whether you're bound by a substance, a relationship, or a life that's out of order, your circumstances won't change until your mind is released from old thought patterns and renewed by God's Word (see Romans 12:2). Start by instituting some new habits, for what you do habitually, you do permanently. Begin the Bible-reading habit. Put it first on your 'to do' list or you'll never do it consistently. Read aloud and you won't get distracted so easily. 'Those who discover these words live, really live; body and soul, they're bursting with health' (Proverbs 4:22 MSG). Next, learn to pray. Set a special time, otherwise everything else will crowd it out. In prayer, God will tell you how He feels about things. Can you imagine having His input? Attend church regularly (see Hebrews 10:25). Support it with your finances and develop healthy relationships. There are things God will say to you in His house that He won't say anywhere else. Your daily habits are carving out an irreversible future for you. If you want to know where you're going, take another look at your habits!

PRAYER POINT

Help me, Lord, to develop a really honest list of my bad habits and then guide me to find replacements for each one that will build me up in You. I know that the journey to break these habits might be hard, but You are there to help me through. In my weakness, I am made strong in You. I just turn to You today and turn away from the things that bring me down. Amen.

DAY 26

Dealing with your weakness

'He remembered that they were but flesh.'

Psalm 78:39 NIV

We all have weaknesses, but the ones we refuse to deal with: a) draw us magnetically toward the wrong things, b) give Satan a foothold, which quickly becomes a stronghold, and c) schedule tragedy down the line. Be warned: your weakness can emerge at any time, including your closing years! What you fail to master now will master you later. That's why David prayed, 'Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth' (Psalm 71:9 KJV). The Holy Spirit will repeatedly convict you before your weakness destroys you! Jesus told Peter: 'Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22:31-32 NIV). God will continue to use you even while your weakness is growing within you! That's because He's long-suffering and merciful. He provides opportunity after opportunity to reach for His help. Jesus warned Jerusalem, 'how often I have longed to gather your children together...and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate' (Matthew 23:37-38 NIV). Think: when you repeatedly reject God's mercy, what's left? The inevitable consequences! 'What can I do?' you ask. Turn to God! He's neither shocked by your weakness nor unwilling to help you. Confess your sin. Become an enemy to it. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you. Not only can He deliver you, He can turn your greatest weakness into your greatest weapon!

DAY 27

How can I change?

'Be transformed (changed) by that [entire] renewal of your mind.'

Romans 12:2 AMPC

Are you wrestling with a certain problem, thinking, 'If I could just get beyond this, everything would be all right?' Sorry to disappoint you, but when you've conquered this particular problem, God will reveal something else that needs to be dealt with. Relax – you're always going to be working on something! Change doesn't come through human effort without God, frustration, self-rejection, guilt or the white-knuckling works of the flesh. No, change comes as a result of having your mind renewed daily by the Word of God. As you agree with God, believing that what He says is true, change automatically begins. You start to think differently, then talk differently and finally act differently. Be patient with yourself: it's a process that develops in stages. Would you think there was something wrong with a child who couldn't walk perfectly the first few tries? No, you're delighted each time they take another step. When they fall you pick them up, comfort them, clean up their grazes, encourage them to try again, and keep working with them. Do you think God does less for His children? God's not angry with you because you haven't 'arrived'; He's pleased that you're pressing on, trying to stay on the path. It's God's job to '[cause (you) to...be governed by the Holy Spirit]' (2 Corinthians 3:8 AMPC). If you could do it by yourself, you wouldn't need God! So instead of driving yourself harder and harder, start leaning on God more and more!

PRAYER POINT

Lord, You never promised to remove problems but You did promise to be there with me through them and bring me to a place of overcoming them – I rest in that today. I ask, Lord, for a fruitful life in You, that all the promises of the years gone by would visit me like old friends to remind me of what Your desire is for my life. Build me up, Lord, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 28

Fruitful life

'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.'

John 15:8 NKJV

Do you want to know the will of God for your life? Listen: 'I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain' (John 15:16 NKJV).

'But what if my branch is barren and my basket is empty?' you ask. Listen: 'Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away' (John 15:2 NKJV). 'Does that mean I lose my salvation?' you ask. No, Jesus was speaking about branches 'in Me', proving that it's possible to be 'in Christ' yet not be fruitful or enjoy the abundant life He wants you to have. The Greek word for 'take away' is 'airo', which means 'to lift'. New branches have a tendency to trail along the ground. But they don't bear fruit there. When the rain comes they get muddy and mildewed, sick and barren. So, does the vinedresser throw them away? No, they're too valuable for that. He goes through His vineyard with a bucket of water, looking for fallen branches, lifting them out of the dirt and washing them. Remember His words in John 15:3? 'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you' (NKJV). Once they've been washed, He lifts them, wraps them around the trellis, ties them securely and pretty soon, they're thriving. What a picture! Whether you've fallen into the dirt or you're just living beneath your potential, God won't throw you away. No, He'll lift you, cleanse you and help you to flourish again. Why don't you talk to Him today?

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