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Introduction

When the Bible speaks of the word SALVATION as it pertains to us personally, it literally means "DELIVERANCE". By trusting the finished work of the Cross, placing our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, and requesting He forgive us of our sins, we are what the Bible describes as "BORN AGAIN".

When we become a Christian several things take place concerning our sin.

- First, we are saved from the PENALTY of our sins.
- Second, we are saved from the DOMINION or bondage of our sin.
- Third, when we get to heaven, we will be delivered from the PRESENCE of sin.

It is the opinion of many that addiction is a behavior problem. According to that opinion, if this problem is not dealt with over a period of time it may become a disease that can never be cured. What can be very puzzling and even frustrating to many is that with the exception of a few other things, alcohol addiction and drug addiction seem to be the only things that you can never actually recover from. In other words, you will only be in a state of recovery for the rest of your life.

Does a person who has an obsession with food to the level of jeopardizing their health, and perhaps their life, have a disease? If that is true and they are described by some circles of opinion as being in that condition because of their addiction to self-indulgence by over eating; will they be that way for the rest of their lives, even if they get on a diet and/or by some other means lose the weight and regain their health?

My food analogy is not to make light of people that have serious problems when it comes to food, or to say that their addiction is less important than any other. It is simply to help us to understand that a large number of people have bought into the idea that "once an addict, always an addict". Which leads me to believe that the lack of success in many environments that deny the power of God, not as I understand Him, but the God of the Bible, can be attributed to the truth of God's Word when it says:

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7a).

Because of an absence of faith in the power of our All-Powerful God, we have people that see little reason for staying clean if this is

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something that they have to deal with everyday for the rest of their lives; instead of being able to get on with their lives.

There is only one place in God's Word where we find the word ADDICTED, and it is found in **1 Corinthians 16:15** where Paul describes some of the first believers of the region of Achaia as having "**addicted [devoted wholly] themselves to the ministry of the saints**". So we see in the context of this Scripture that even when it was used here it was not an unhealthy, unproductive or destructive addiction.

Anything or anyone that draws us from the presence of and allegiance to Jesus Christ is sin. When it is confessed as sin and forsaken as sin, it is then and only then that a person has the opportunity and privilege of deliverance.

I have never met a person that has fallen into the bondage of addiction that would not choose freedom over recovery. Jesus stated that it is the knowing of truth and that truth sets us free (**John 8:32**)! That means that we can have the knowledge of the truth as it is found in God's word and the application of that knowledge can set us free. Sadly, many people do not have an understanding of their position in Christ when they get saved. Having the knowledge that I have been delivered from the dominion or bondage of my sin when I am saved, I then spend the rest of my Christian life learning how to walk in that position of deliverance.

For the person that has been in the grip of addiction for a long period of time or even for a short period of time, this can be a very difficult struggle to overcome. Most of us did not slip into addiction over night and most of us will not overcome it that way either. It can be best described from a Bible perspective as LEARNED habitual sin that over a period of time became a stronghold in our life.

Remember, deliverance is for the Christian! It is literally a change of what we let rule. Addiction allows the body, the flesh, to rule the Spirit — walking in deliverance allows the Spirit to rule over the flesh.

Having been on both sides of the fence I do not and would not base my opinion on my own personal experience. However, my experience lines up with what the Bible teaches, and frankly that is all that really matters.

I asked God to forgive me of my sins and invited Jesus to be my Savior in 1984. I wish I could say that on that day I put everything

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behind me and have walked an unblemished life since then, but that has not been the case. The first year of my Christian life was perhaps the greatest battle that I had ever known. For the first time I realized what I became and also for the first time I began to care about it. I found myself where I have seen so many others — continuing to live in a way that I truly did not want to live, but not knowing how to stop it. I would have days and even weeks that I would not use, but I could never put any length of clean time together. (Romans 7)

I remember the feeling of hopelessness that accompanied failure after failure. I remember thinking that I would never really overcome my addiction. All I had to hold on to was the possibility of living in survival mode, if I would live at all. I really did love the Christian life, but I could never believe that I would ever be free from my past — it would always cast a shadow over my future.

On the third Saturday of May in 1986 I relapsed for what I did not know would be the last time. Like so many other times I thought that I could be around the environment and not become part of it. And like so many other times, I proved myself too weak for the challenge.

I came home early that evening and was confronted by my wife who was then seven months pregnant with our first child. She asked me if I had been drinking and I confessed that I had been. She told me that she had been praying for me while I was gone, and that she had told the Lord that she could no longer try to stop me from drinking. She told me that she would continue to be my wife as long as she could, but "God has to stop you from drinking" and she walked out of the room.

I really do not understand how it all happened, but what I do understand is that God honored the prayers of a loving wife. I did not get up the next day motivated by the fear of losing my wife and an unborn child. I did not grit my teeth and clench my fists and hope that I would never use again. I simply got up the next day and began doing what I already knew to do that was right.

I began to read my Bible more frequently and we attended church more frequently than we had been before. I began to grow in the Lord and continued to listen for things that the Pastor would teach that I might be able to put into practice the following week. What I found out was that what needed to change the most was me.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months and months into years and I have never been the same. I no longer looked at my life as

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"just being sober", but I have looked at my life as a **"new creation in Christ"** (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Bible describes my life just as it describes any other believer's life. Since the day of my salvation, I am being sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God, through the Word of God. The change has been taking place from the inside out and the journey has been amazing.

We surrendered our lives to full time ministry in 1988 and I began to serve in my first full time ministry position in 1990. Since that time the majority of the ministry that I have overseen has been with the "down and outers". The Lord has allowed me to minister to people that have the same struggles that I have been set free from. I have always prayed for wisdom and discernment in dealing with the challenges of ministry that assist people in getting free from addiction.

God has shown me what I believe to be a common pattern of most people when they are attempting to break free from addiction. I am not saying that it is the case in all situations, but it is very visible in the hundreds of people that I have dealt with; even in my own life as well.

What I have observed in many people is that they go through what I describe as **"Four Stages of Sobriety"**. Having a good understanding of these stages will help those that are trying to minister to people struggling with addictions, as well as helping those that are struggling with the addictions themselves.

- Stage 1 ... "The Trouble Stage"
- Stage 2 ... "The Happy Stage"
- Stage 3 ... "The Determined Stage"
- Stage 4 ... "The Reality Stage"

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Stage 1 ... "The Trouble Stage"

As I said previously, this does not mean that all situations are the same, but in most cases the majority of people that I have dealt with begin trying to get clean (sober) because they have created some sort of trouble as a result of their addiction. Things [troubles] have been building for a length of time, and the bottom is either beginning to drop out or it has dropped out all together. The trouble can be resulting in legal matters, family break-ups, the loss of employment, the loss of children, homes — the list of losses can go on and on — they are in trouble.

I describe this as a window of time that God is using to get their attention and give them an opportunity to get help.

- **Psalms 31:9 — Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly.**
- **Psalms 9:9 — The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.**
- **Psalms 50:15 — And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.**

Video ~ Part 2:

For the person that chooses to take God at His word, there is help. We see that the Lord has said in His Word that those that wish to be helped out of their trouble must call upon God for the help they need. So then, one of the most important things that we can teach anyone is that when their experience lines up with Scripture, there is hope!

In this stage, as in all four stages, MOTIVES play a very important role in staying clean. There is NOT a bad reason to get clean but there can be, and sometimes are, wrong motives for doing so. It is God that searches the heart (1 Chronicles 28:9), but if we ask, He also gives us discernment when helping people.

There is a common thread that God is looking for in each of the "Four Stages" and that is sincerity. When a person is sincere about getting help, they will be willing to do whatever it takes. When they begin to make excuses for what they are NOT willing to do in order to get help, it is often a sign that they are not being sincere.

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Note: Making excuses to not get clean is not uncommon, however, when the Lord continues to provide solutions for every excuse that people have and they still oppose the help that is being offered, then it is likely they are still deceiving themselves and trying to deceive others.

While in the "Trouble Stage" people often display the following behaviors when they are not being honest about their addiction:

- False humility, which can display itself in agreeing with everyone in order to get them to stop pressuring them and give them another chance.
- Overkill when asking for forgiveness and begging for another chance without having to meet other expectations and responsibilities.
- Making promises that they have never kept in the past in order to avoid further trouble.
- Suddenly they become concerned with things that never concerned them in the past while they were using in order to avoid going to further treatment. For Example: They can't go to rehab because of a job; they don't want to leave their children; they do not know how they are going to make ends meet financially ... as if any of these things mattered before.

Thank the Lord that by the power and grace of God there are many people that make it out of the "Trouble Stage." Some do it willingly, and others make it out by force. There is obviously no bad reason to get out of this stage — if they do not, it will only get worse. We remember that God's discipline is not always pleasant and is never invited. On the other hand, the correction of the Lord can be the saving grace for anyone that responds in a godly manner by submitting to the will of God for their lives.

Hebrews 12:6

**For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,
and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.**

Proverbs 3:11

**My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD;
neither be weary of his correction:**

Job 5:17

**Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore
despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:**

- **Job 5:17 - Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:**

Always remember: There are no specific timetables for any of the "stages" mentioned. It would be impossible for anyone but God to know in advance the timing of God. The trouble may last for a short season or a long one. But one thing we do know is that as we continue to do the things that God leads us to do, we will begin to see the trouble subside and brighter days in the future.

Stage 2 ... "The Happy Stage"

The "Happy Stage" begins when the trouble begins to subside. There still may be responsibilities such as court dates and other requirements that have been placed on the individual to walk through, but for the most part things are looking much brighter than they have been looking in the recent past.

They are attending meetings and Bible studies, reading their Bible more consistently, and beginning to develop a consistent prayer life. For many people, things have never looked any better for them at this time in their lives.

What we must understand is the "Happy Stage" will not last forever as an everyday thing. The reason being, happiness is an emotion that comes and goes. On the other hand, joy is a constant in spite of the circumstantial pressures of life and there WILL BE new pressures down the road.

Here are a few reasons for us to understand why the "Happy Stage" does not last forever:

- The Bible does not teach that circumstantially we will always remain on the mountain top of life; there WILL be times when we go through the valley. When a person, especially a new believer, begins to experience a "valley situation," they can easily be thrown off because of their spiritual immaturity. Their typical response can sometimes be, "I am finally trying to do everything right, why is this happening now?"

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have

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**its perfect work, that you may be perfect
and complete, lacking nothing.**

- There are many things that are still being done for them and they haven't been handed all the responsibility that they will soon have.
- There is the misunderstanding that things will always be good, and the unawareness that things will very well likely get harder again between the times they get better.
- They will soon learn that the newness of being clean wears off and that the newness of being clean is not what keeps them clean.

When the trials of life come our way it is very common for the person that has struggled with addiction to begin to consider the "old ways" of coping with their struggles.

While in the "Happy Stage" an amazing thing takes place. There is the protective and provisional Hand of God for extended periods of time. During this time the person also experiences very little adversity in their lives (not implying that they still don't have some). They are able to gain ground and grow in their faith, establish new and healthy relationships as God builds a support system for them and around them.

They are, in a very real and miraculous way, secluded from much of the adversity that might come their way in order that they might build spiritual strength for the journey. It is what we might call the, "jump start of God" to a life of joy and contentment.

Stage 3 ... "The Determined Stage"

This stage begins when a person begins to see that it will not be as easy as they may have thought it would be to stay clean. It has been said that anyone can get clean, but it takes a whole lot more effort to stay clean.

In **The Most Excellent Way** at First Baptist Church, Panama City, we have always taught people that there are two very important ingredients that they need to be aware of for their success: God's Power and our effort! God is not lacking any Power. It is only when we do what we can to participate in the sanctification process that we will have success.

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I have learned "this stage" is where most of the failure occurs that leads to relapse. The happy emotional days begin to separate themselves and the newness of being clean begins to wear off. They are not getting as many pats on the back for being clean as they may have been before, and there is also much more expected of them in the way of responsibility. Many people that should have gone to rehab to help them get started with sobriety often fail in "this stage" as well. They had the appearance of having it together, but their old thinking sometime kicks in which can cause them to assume they can use old tricks to move things along faster.

Note: If we are not constantly growing in the Lord, we are only going to continue doing things in our own strength using our own wisdom. With the absence of spiritual growth, there is no change on the inside which produces change on the outside — before too long it may seem to get too difficult.

This is also a time when the temptations of old relationships are often becoming more frequent. Without the proper instruction in the beginning of their sobriety concerning what to do in these situations, many people allow unhealthy relationships to linger in their lives. This gives Satan an opportunity to use them to their own downfall. Even with the proper instruction concerning how to handle the allurements of unhealthy relationships. That in itself does not stop the "old people" in active addiction from trying to stay in touch with them.

Satan is very clever to send what he knows to be a counterfeit replacement for the presence of the Lord that has produced peace and contentment. He will, very often in "this stage", play on a person's loneliness and emotions to tempt them into thinking that they have been abandoned by the Lord and others. This again is where the Word of God stands in their defense — the Bible teaches that **"He will never leave us nor forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5)**.

Some actions that are noticeable when people are in the "Determined Stage":

- Overkill when trying to convince you that they are doing well.
- Inconsistency in their attendance to meetings and Bible studies.
- Being defensive when questioned about certain situations or subjects.
- A lack of excitement [enthusiasm] for spiritual things.

Being determined can be the very thing that we need in order to overcome the adversity we will experience. It is not always a lack of determination that decides the outcome; it is the method we use in

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order that we might persevere through trying times. Spiritual battles are won with spiritual weaponry.

Ephesians 6:11

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

We will never win in our own strength and when we try that method we are setting ourselves up for failure. Reach out to those people that God has placed in your life that have fought the battles you are currently facing. Ask questions and learn how they walked through the adversity. Cry out to God everyday for wisdom, strength and resolve in order that you might not give up and give in to the struggle.

God is for you, not against you and He knows all about the struggle you are going through.

Stage 4 - "The Reality Stage"

With God's help, this is "the stage" we are trying to get everyone to. This happens when a person becomes aware that their addiction is something that they can never do again for the rest of their lives — they are set on to take the necessary steps to see that it never happens again.

There is no specific timeline for Christian growth. HOWEVER, when a people find themselves in the "Reality Stage" it is because of their Christian growth and maturity.

- They have decided that they would rather please the Lord than please themselves.
- They have decided that God's people are their people.
- They have decided that their lives will be a trophy of God's grace for the entire world to see.
- They have decided that Satan has had his way long enough and it is time to allow the Lord to have free reign in their lives.
- They have decided that church, prayer, Bible study and meetings are things that take priority in their lives.
- They have decided that their role, if they are, as a godly Mom or Dad is vital to the future of their children.

- They have decided that because of what Jesus has done for them, they are now ready to give it all up for Him and do whatever He desires for them to do.
- They have decided that there is now a life that is called the "abundant life", full of meaning and purpose that has been promised to them.
- And they have decided that there is NOTHING they left in the past that will ever be worth going back for.
- **They have decided to sell out, stand out, live out, speak up, stand up and LIVE OUT LOUD, JESUS!**

For the child of God:

Reality says: "I am God's child."

John 1:12

**But as many as received Him,
to them gave He power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on His name:**

Reality says: "I will glorify God."

1 Corinthians 10:31

**Whether therefore ye eat, or drink,
or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.**

Reality says: "My past happened for a reason."

Romans 8:28

**And we know that all things work together
for good to them that love God,
to them who are the called according to [His] purpose.**

Reality says: "I must continue to learn and grow."

2 Peter 3:18

**But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our
Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.**

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1 Peter 1:13-16 NKJV

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be **sober**, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
¹⁴as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;
¹⁵but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
¹⁶because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."



1 Peter 5:8-11 NKJV

Be **sober**, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
⁹Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.
¹⁰But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
¹¹To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.
Amen.