

I Can Resist Everything But Temptation (And Chocolate)

The famous Irish writer Oscar Wilde once jokingly said, "I can resist everything but temptation." Most of us struggle with habits and even addictions that get the better of us over and over again.

Maybe you have a problem with your temper or you are trying to quit smoking or you have a problem with alcoholism or pornography. Some habits are learned behaviours while others include an ongoing struggle to push through withdrawal symptoms on top of the bad habitual behaviour to get to the other side.

I know the power of addiction having battled one for much of my life so I can sympathise with anyone doing it tough battling an addiction. If we are trapped with such problems how do we break free?

In John 8:32 we read Jesus' famous words, "**And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**"

What did He mean by the truth setting us free? How can the truth set us free from an anger problem, alcoholism or pornography or other bad habits and addictions?

When we fall victim to sin we do so because we believe certain lies that accompany those sins. In order to be freed from sin we need to recognize those lies and counter those lies with the truth. There are a whole host of different lies and different lines that Satan uses on us to lure us into sin. Let's look at two of the most common lies as examples of this point of countering the lies of sin with the truth.

Lie 1: Sin is Good For Me

William Backus and Marie Chapien in their book "Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?" make these comments about identifying and defeating the lies of sin with the truth of God. They write:

Sin depends upon and grows out of the believing of certain lies...There are...common lies with which you may be familiar. The first is "X" is good for me.

Sin results from the misbelief that something contrary to the Word of God is good for you. Sin may seem like something good for you because it will pamper you in some way, make you feel good, save you from trouble or embarrassment...

Possibly you tell yourself a particular sin is good for you because you 'need' it in your life—you can't do without it, it is fundamental to your happiness. So you steal that record from the record department, you lie on your time sheet at work or cheat on your income tax because you believe 'it's good for me'...

So "X" looks good for today. You're only human, after all. And you just don't have any resistance; surely God can understand that. (You really don't want resistance because you'd rather believe "X" is good for you.)

This is how sin deceives. And according to Romans 7:11, sin kills. "X" is not good for you. "X" is lethal. It kills. Jesus met "X" with the truth. The devil came to Him and said, 'Making bread out of stones is good for you. It will prove you're the Son of God. No one will doubt you after that.' Satan also tried to convince Jesus that jumping off the temple's pinnacle [and worshipping him] was good for Him. He told Him, 'It will prove to the people you really are the Messiah. What can it hurt? It will be good for you because then I'll give you the kingdom without the cross.'

Jesus met every temptation by challenging its accompanying lie. He said in effect, 'That isn't true, Satan. The truth is, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' Jesus demonstrated by His example that we should live only by the words that proceed out of the mouth of God.

We can take the first step toward defeating temptation by refusing to put ourselves into a place where we listen to Satan's lies" (p.29-31).

If we are honest with ourselves we can usually think through and see the consequences of our actions will always result in a kickback that will hurt us if we go against what God says we should do. There might be a short term pleasure but it will be followed by long term pain and regret.

We might believe in our minds that sin is not good for us but do we believe it in our hearts or do we believe that the benefits of a certain sins will outweigh the hurt it will produce? When we are tempted what are our choices telling us about whether we believe a certain sin is good for us or not?

We need to call on God's help to see through the lie that our wrong actions are good for us and call on His help to be more and more convicted that only His way is the right way to go when we are sorely tempted to try it our own way instead of God's way.

Lie 2: I Can't Help Myself

The second big lie I'd like to look at is "I can't help myself." This lie says, "I've got to do it. I am helpless to stop myself. The temptation is bigger than I am." This is a lie that is particularly potent with those who have addictive behaviours. It's often accompanied by another lie - "Just one more time and then I'll repent good and proper."

Some people who have given up smoking and started again have told themselves, "I can't make it. I'm too weak to be able to quit cigarettes." Many people with besetting sins and addictions often find themselves believing the same lie but what does the Bible say?

First of all, let's look at 1 Corinthians 10:13. In this verse Paul writes the following: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**"

God won't give us more than we can bear. The temptation is not too big for us to resist.

In Philippians 4:13 the Apostle Paul wrote: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Paul says I can do all things through Jesus - not I can't help myself.

Now God is ready and willing to help us if we maintain a close intimacy with Him through prayer and study of His word, commit to following His lead and not give up regardless of the besetting problem we might be fighting whether it's anger, sexual lust, gluttony, smoking, alcoholism or whatever.

In closing this article I would like to share with you three stories that have given me encouragement as I battled with my own personal demons and I hope that they can be encouraging to you if you are going through a similar battle in your own life.

At one point in my life I felt extremely depressed and even fearful of God's rebuke being emotionally at the lowest point of an addiction that I was battling with. In my mind I knew that God loves us at all times but at this time I thought that the only love that God could give me was His hard or tough love. Perhaps you've felt this way at times. There was no way He would give the other side of love, what we might call His soft love. At least, that was what I thought.

I was looking for something else when, quite by chance, it appeared as if God directed me to a passage in a book that was everything I needed to hear at that time. It spoke of God's incredible patience with us when we struggle with sins and compared God's working with us like marinating a piece of tough meat. There is simply no way to rush the process. It said that God has given us a lifetime to soak in His grace to become the people that He wants us to be. It was very moving and it was as if God was putting His arm around me and saying, "It's OK. We have plenty of time to work on this. Look, we'll get there in the end."

Alan Loy McGuiness in his book "The Friendship Factor" shares this story about not giving up:

In friendship, as in anything else, you will succeed if you are undeterred by failures and disappointments, and keep trying. **It is seldom noted that Babe Ruth missed and missed and missed the ball. In fact, he struck out 1330 times**, a record in futility unapproached by any other player in the history of the game. But what people remember is that he hit 714 home runs, a record unequalled for 40 years.

Someone once asked him the secret of his success at the plate. 'I just keep going up there and swinging at them,' he replied (p.187).

The last story is one I have had the opportunity to witness personally. My home state of Queensland entered the national cricket competition called the Sheffield Shield way back in 1926. It took Queensland a very long 69 years to win its first ever Sheffield Shield, which finally happened in 1994/95. Queensland had come second a heartbreaking total of 14 times up until then.

So often Queensland made a great start but would fade away at the end of the season when they were always scheduled with away games. Queensland often missed out on the final or had to play the final away from home because they finished second. It became this incredible psychological barrier to win at the latter end of the competition because they were scheduled with so many away games at the end of the season. One player from another team rubbed salt in the wounds by saying that it was the time of year when the monkey on Queensland's back becomes a gorilla.

In the end Queensland finally pushed through that barrier of winning away from home and finished at the top of the table in 1994/95. Not only did they host the final for the first time but won it by a massive margin. Only a mere two years later Queensland won its second title and they did it by winning the final away from home. Since that first win Queensland have now won a total of 7 times after taking 69 years to win the first one.

The lesson from that is that it can take just one good victory to break the drought and completely transform any situation once a person's confidence is recharged by a good win.

To be set free from sin we need to find out what lies we are telling ourselves and counter those with the truth of God's word. The plain truth is that sin is not good for us and we can overcome sin through Jesus Christ who strengthens us and can set us free.