**The Basics on Turning to God from Idols**

**By Gregory Madison**



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INTRODUCTION

 Do you remember when a lot of people were concerned about being “politically correct?” As we expose and dispose of addictions, we must do so in a manner that is biblically correct to give unto God the glory that is due His name and to establish a formula that would be towards our greatest good.

 Idolatry is the most biblically accurate definition of addictions. Idolatry separates us from God. That’s why it is so important to bring Christ into the equation from the very start. Only He can bridge the gap between God and man. Unless we are given peace with God through the blood of Christ we don’t have a direct connection with God. Except we have taken Jesus as our Savior then we are still in our sins regardless of an addiction.

**Phases**

 *Turning to God from Idols* has three phases. I encourage my readers not to look at these phases as a “checklist.” (Though I don’t *fully* endorse the 12 steps of *Alcoholics* *Anonymous* I don’t believe that *they* should be taken as a checklist either.)

 **I believe that a lot of the various**

**list/steps that people produce usually have common features and are more of an *observation* of what God is doing in a person’s heart than a “to do list**.”

 There are several characteristics that are a part of any given method of dealing with addictions (be it secular or Christian, 12-step or otherwise.) Two of the basic characteristics are *reasoning* and *repentance* (change.) A third characteristic is one that only exist within a Christ-centered approach to addictions. Rejoicing is something that only a follower of Christ can experience, practice and enjoy.

SOUND REASONING

**“Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden man has listened to his desires more than his reasoning. When God created man, the reason, the emotion, and the will all worked in perfect harmony. Reason led way in the understanding of God’s will, the will consented to God’s will, and the emotions delighted in doing it. But with the entrance of sin into man’s soul, these three faculties began to work at cross purposes to one another and to God.”** -Puritan Thomas Manton

 The very first question that we are faced with in dealing with addictions is whether we understand what we are dealing with. The scriptures encourage us to get understanding. Without the understanding that God gives we will never be able to treat our addictions in a manner that is pleasing to God.

 We need reasoning and understanding to form convictions. In order for any type of lasting change to take place, a person must be *convinced* that what they are doing is wrong. And so, change begins with conviction. Conviction is defined as **a settled persuasion**, the state of being **convinced**. Unless we are thoroughly convinced that our actions are wrong, we have no reason to change.

 It is within the confines of reason that God gives us a foundation on which to grow. The reasoning that is needed in phase one is God’s reasoning. As the scripture says,

*“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”*

***(Proverbs 14:12)***

Without God’s reasoning, we never fully see the depth and the severity of addictions.

**The Fear Factor**

 The fear of the Lord (reverence for God) is the most crucial element in our treatment of addictions. We must decide that we want to change in the way that God wants us to change, for the same reasons that God wants us to change. As we stand before the Lord, we must consider our motives. That which honors God and benefits us best is done out of reverence towards God. The “reverential factor” cannot be ignored if we are seeking true and lasting sobriety. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Who would deny that we are inclined to make foolish choices as we are ruled by addictions?

 First and foremost, addictions are an insult to God. As idols, addictions receive the worship and affection that God alone is worthy of. It is unfortunate that this basic issue is rarely discussed in the arena of what is called “recovery.” Yet and still, it is just true as the day that man was created. John Calvin is quoted stating that “**the heart of man in as an idol factory**.”

**Worship**

 **Worship was originally spelled “worthship” and it means to acknowledge the worth of the object worshipped. Can it be that drugs, alcohol or something else is worth more to us than God?** This is idolatry.

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods) – [from anything that would occupy the place in your heart owed to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life.]* **1 John 5:21 (Amplified version**

 The way that we worship is:

* 1. **Through making sacrifices**
	2. **Allowing something to dominate or control**
	3. **Give honor/glorify, praise**
	4. **To exhibit trust**

 As this is true in our worship of God, so it is in the worship of addictions.

**Useless Idols**

 Not only are idolatrous addictions an insult to God, they are an insult to humanity. Though we attach ourselves to addictions because we think that they have something to offer, we are deceived. You don’t have to experience an addiction to discover that in the long run (sometimes quickly) it proves to be non-production and even destructive. To discover the uselessness of addictions all we need to do is refer to the definition of an idol.

 One of the definitions for an idol comes from the New Unger’s Bible Dictionary. **An idol is “an empty thing, rendered elsewhere ‘trouble’, ‘iniquity’, ‘vanity’, ‘wickedness’, etc. The primary idea of the root word seems to be emptiness, nothingness, as a breath or a vapor. The Hebrew word for idol (awen) denotes a vain, false, wicked thing. Just like idols, addictions have an emptiness about them.**

**Resolution**

 **When God reasons with us we get a view of reality. With a proper reverence for God we are able to see the reality of addictions**. Be sure that you reverently build your foundation of sobriety on the reasoning that God has given in His word!

SOUND REPENTANCE

 If addiction is idolatry, then is it a sin. If addiction is a sin, then it is something that we can repent of. Conviction coupled with reverence for God leads to repentance. **Repentance is an act of self-denial.** It is to surrender to the Kingdom of God, to relinquish my own power, and to stop seeking glory for myself. The need for repentance can be expressed in so many ways. Repentance determines our intimacy with the Almighty. This is because one of the components of repentance is confession. To confess to God means to say the same thing that God is saying about a matter.

*Repentance separates us from the values of the world* ***(expressing God’s worth rather than the idols of the world.)***

 Repentance is a by-product of reverence leading to purity. Repentance calls for priorities while restoring order and manageability. Repentance is a complete reversal of one’s attitude and values.

***There are four basic reasons why a person decides to abstain from an addiction. (Only four, although they sometimes coincide with one another or can be expressed in other words.)***

1. ***To better their lives***
2. ***To avoid the consequences***
3. ***To better the lives of those around them***
4. ***Out of reverence for God***

In a book titled “Manhood Restored: How the Gospel makes Men Whole”, Eric Mason says that we have four options in our dealings with sin.

**Option #1: You can deny that it is sin and accept it as normal behavior.**

**Option #2: You can attempt to excuse it or justify it.**

**Option #3: You can hate it and suffer under the guilt of it.**

**Option #4: You can repent and be cleansed from it.**

Ways of handling addiction

**Unacceptable Acceptable**

 Suicide Biblical means

 (immediate death) (approved of God)

 Continuance

 (uncertain death)

 Non-biblical measures

 (permissive, yet dead to God)

**The Goal of Repentance**

 The goal behind repentance is not just to turn away from the things that God is not pleased with but to turn towards Christ. It is in turning toward Christ that we can experience the highest degree of intimacy/fellowship with Him, radiating His image and likeness and thereby become a blessing to others in whatever way He chooses.

*“And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again”.* ***2 Corinthians 5:15***

**Practicing Repentance**

The acts of repentance are practices that lead to growth and maturity. They are the means of discarding all that would stand in the way of our relationship to God as well as others and prevent us from becoming a reflection of Jesus Christ.

 Three basic practices that aid us in our repentance from addictions are abstinence, fasting and fellowship.

1. Abstinence

 It goes without saying that to repent from an addiction one must abstain from the addiction (but we’ll just throw it in for the sake of clarity.) We must not be half-hearted in our resignation.

*“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve the Lord.”* ***Joshua 24:14 KJV***

 The words "put away" carry a certain meaning. Put away—to turn off, decline, depart, eschew, go (aside), be past, pluck away, remove, turn (aside, away), withdraw.

*“Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him,* ***Put away*** *the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.” KJV*

 The idea of changing garments in Genesis 35:2 is significant to the idea brought forth in the New Testament of putting off the "old man" and putting on the new man found in Christ (Ephesians 4:21-24; Colossians 3:9-10). Some of the Greek words used in these passages had to do with changing clothes. Back in biblical days, the average person would rarely obtain a new set of clothing. By the time they got a change of clothing, their old clothes were usually very raggedy and soiled. As it was a joy and a delight for these people to put off their old clothes and put on the new, so it should be for us to turn from every addiction and cleave to the Lord.

**Complete abstinence**

 Often, there are other addictions that accompany the *primary* addiction that people participate in. For instance, drug addiction is often accompanied by some sort of sexual addiction, cigarette smoking goings with drinking, and so on.

 **While some may say that people need to take care of one issue at a time, I am stating that the believer in Christ must forsake anything that they are convinced within themselves would be an offence to God. I’m not saying that this is easy, but it’s biblical. Anything that comes between us and God must go.**

 **As quiet as it’s kept, if we do not deal with each and every thing that we know to be offensive to God, then we do not hear His voice as well. When we don’t hear His voice so well, we become vulnerable to drifting from the safety that He affords. If we continue to engage in certain behavior (outside of our *primary* addiction), it may eventually lead us back into the primary addiction**.

2. Fasting

 Repentance and fasting seem to go hand in hand in the Scriptures. Many times, where repentance is mentioned in Scripture there is fasting. Since fasting is a practice of denying ourselves, then it can be of great benefit to those who were previously engage in the self-absorbing life of addiction. (Though I just called fasting a practice, we could just as well call it a habit.) ***It is very important for those who are turning from addictions to replace bad habits with good habits.***

 You can decide whether you will engage in a partial fast or a strict fast. A partial fast is one in which you decide upon abstaining from various foods (usually the participant abstains from meats.) A strict fast is the practice of abstaining from all foods (and drinking only water.) I would advise those who have health conditions to consult their physician before fasting. The main thing is that ***a fast is meant to be God centered rather than self-centered***.

 No matter what kind of fast you choose- **a fast is something that is different than the ordinary. That’s just the type of life that God is calling us to have (different.)** You might say that a fast can be a statement or an agreement with God that we are going to do things differently and that we are giving ourselves completely over to Him.

3. Fellowship/commune/converse

 a. With God

 b. With those of like faith

 We fellowship with God by spending time with Him in three different ways. First, we listen to God primarily through His Word. Second, we talk to God in prayer. Third, we fellowship with God by what we do. We fellowship with others by spending time with them talking, studying and praying together.

RESOUNDING JOY

 The third phase in our treatment of addictions is to rejoice in the Lord. We resound with joy as we embrace the Lord. George Muller said that, “the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is have my soul happy in the Lord.” Muller is credited for saying that, “our first duty as Christians is to get ourselves happy in God.” Nehemiah 8:10 says that **the joy of the Lord is your strength**.

 What good is repentance if it does not lead to joy? Deliverance is not complete without joy. Joy is what makes this formula of sanctification complete. **More than anything else, *Turning to God from Idols* is all about intimate fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ while recognizing the glory of God**.

 **If we never experience the joy of the Lord in our repentance, then I doubt if we have really repented.**

 Biblical repentance is designed towards leading us to rejoice. An example is found in the King James Version of Acts 3:19.

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

 In his book titled “Counterfeit Gods”, Timothy Keller says that,

**“Rejoicing and repentance must go together. Repentance without rejoicing will lead to despair. Rejoicing without repentance is shallow and will only provide passing inspiration instead of deep change. When we repent out of fear of consequences, we are not really sorry for the sin, but for ourselves… In fear-based repentance, we don’t learn to hate the sin for itself, and it doesn’t lose its attractive power. We learn only to refrain from it for our own sake… Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin.”**

**Exclusiveness**

 In the introduction I mentioned that of the three phases that are presented in one form or another by various programs the one that is only available to Christians is *rejoicing*. You may ask why! The joy of which I speak is not self-manufactured. The joy of the Lord is the fruit of the Spirit (therefore it’s supernatural.)

 Jesus Christ provides the only means of forgiveness with God. Forgiveness with God produces joy. **Through the blood of Christ, providing forgiveness, we are given the greatness level intimacy with God there is.** If the truth were known; **the joy that God gives in Christ is measureless**.

 This leads us to the elements of joy. One of those elements being ***contentment***. Contentment allows those who have chased after idols to rest. Joy produces satisfaction with what God has given us. Very closely related to contentment is the element of ***gratitude*** or thanksgiving. We are not just satisfied with the things that God has provided us with, we are thankful.

 Yet and still the two of these elements (contentment and gratitude) cannot exist without praise unto God. ***Joy is being full of praise***. Praise is essential to joy. This leads us right back to our theme of reverence as well. True reverence is always, always, always accompanied with praise. There is no such thing as reverence without praise, and there is no such thing as praise without reverence.

CONCLUSION

 Have you found joy in an addiction? Probably not! Certainly not the joy that is found in Jesus! Here is reason to repent! God

has so much in store for us.

*“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”*

***1 Corinthians 2:9, KJV***

God has expressed His love for us in so many ways, but the greatest demonstration of His love was when He gave us His Son. And so, let us show our love for God by rejecting the idols of addiction and clinging to Christ!

***that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life.***

***Deuteronomy 30:20***

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**The Basics on Turning to God from Idols**

is a brief adaptation of the book “Turning to God from Idols: A Biblical Approach to Addictions” by the same author.To go [www.turningtogodfromidols.com](http://www.turningtogodfromidols.com) for more information.

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