

Beyond Addictions

Free to live a new life in Christ Jesus



Transforming the way we think

Lesson 1

You are not what you think you are.
But what you think, you are.
Dr. Howard G. Hendricks, *Living By The Book*

Many people who struggle with addiction believe that they only need a little change in order to overcome the problem. They attack it on one front, usually in a physical way, “I can quit drinking if I stop going by the bar on the way home.” Or they move to another town to separate themselves from the people who got them in trouble. The battle against addiction is deeper than that. It is spiritual, physical, mental and emotional. It is waged first and most often in our thought life.

A number of addicts have entered “rehab” to get cleaned up. Others wind up in prison and as a result they are physically separated from the substance that they were addicted to. Unfortunately, once they are exposed to it again, many return to the pit of addiction. Why?

In many cases, the body may undergo detox but there are still poisonous thoughts running around in your brain. I often hear conversations on the prison yard that revolve around drinkin’ and druggin’. Now the men in the conversations may claim that they don’t want to return to that lifestyle again but it is easy to tell where their hearts lie. Guess what happens when they have the freedom to choose their own direction? They drift right back to the same lousy lifestyle that they were in before and ... eventually they are back on the prison yard revisiting those same old conversations, only this time they have a longer prison sentence. It is a life-killing, vicious cycle.

What about rehabilitation? Isn’t that the solution? *Rehabilitation* can accomplish a little but most rehab programs only address outward issues and avoid the core need in our lives. The Bible teaches us that we need to be *transformed*, not *reformed* or *rehabilitated*. Even as Christians, we need to change our ways of thinking; we need to be transformed through the renovation of our minds. Transformation is an inside-out process that involves the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of a believer in Jesus Christ.

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This kind of radical change is necessary for everyone regardless of whether you struggle with drugs, alcohol, pornography, sexual addictions or other sin issues. The following scripture passage tells us how to begin this radical change.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (metamorphosed) by the renewing (renovation) of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
Romans 12:1-2

Paul is begging you to take action in Romans 12:1-2, “I beg you brother”. This is very personal. Write your own name in the first sentence in place of “brethren” so that it reads, “I beseech (beg) you therefore (Your Name) by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” Paul is crying out for you to give your life, your very physical life to God. This is complete surrender to the will of God. This isn’t a “little change”. It requires more than changing your habits or moving to another apartment. It is allowing God to direct the life that He has given you and submitting to the authority of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

“Present you bodies as a living sacrifice”. That is a commitment to change. It’s a willingness to submit your life to Christ and to see what He can do with it. Let’s face it, you really don’t have much to lose. Your plan and my plan for our lives didn’t turn out very well. Following our desires led us to sorrow.

Many of us prayed the sinner’s prayer. We knew we needed to change but at that time we were not willing to submit our lives to Christ. Our cry may have been “Lord please change my circumstances” but we were not willing to let Him change our lives. God loves you. You can trust Him with your life. Allow Him to change you as you submit your life to Him.

God’s perfect plan is for us to live holy lives.

What does it mean to be “holy, acceptable unto God”? Being holy means to be set apart for God. This is the way to true happiness and true fulfillment. Matthew 5:3-11 includes those beautiful Beatitudes that describe true blessedness or true happiness. Matthew 5:6 says, “blessed (oh how happy) are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”

The way to true happiness is to hunger and thirst, to strongly desire, righteousness. That’s a strange twist. I used to think that true happiness was found in going for the gusto, chasing girls, grabbing the big bucks. Nope. The Bible says that true happiness is found in seeking true righteousness or true holiness. Jesus says that those who strongly desire righteousness will be filled with happiness. True happiness and fulfillment actually come as a result of seeking true righteousness and holiness.

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So, if you were seeking real happiness by going for the gusto then you were going in the wrong direction. It's like jumping in your car in North Carolina and driving east with the intention of going to California! You won't get there. It doesn't matter how many people have told you that you that this is the right direction. You need to change direction and follow the one true map. The Bible is the map.

Paul begins this passage in Romans 12 by begging us to present our bodies as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to God. This is a picture of someone who is honestly hungering and thirsting after righteousness; this is a person who is heading in the right direction.

How can we change direction?

According to Romans 12:1-2 we change direction by: 1) not being conformed or shaped by the world around us, and 2) being transformed (metamorphosed) by the renewing of our minds.

First of all, stop allowing the pattern of the world around you to shape the way you think and act. Television, movies and other forms of mass media flood your mind with images of what a lost world calls success. It's glitzy, shiny and seems carefree. It says, "Have another drink." "If it feels good, do it." "You're 500 miles from home, forget about your wife."

Advertising can be very deceiving. It shows you the good time you can have downing a few beers but it doesn't show you the drunk driving accident that happened a few hours later or the phone call from the girl when she tells you that she is pregnant or has AIDS. One step in that direction leads to more until it becomes a pattern of life. Many have been conformed to this pattern and later found themselves sitting in a holding cell wondering, "How did this happen? Where did I go wrong?"

Unfortunately, these worldly images do not reveal the consequences of drinking that brewski, toking on that joint or getting that girl to sleep with you. However, we see the consequences of succumbing to these temptations all around us ... broken marriages, children growing up without their parents, anger, depression, AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, violence, poverty, prison. It doesn't take a genius to see that the acts of *momentary pleasure* offered by the world pay off in *long-term suffering and pain*. This is the result of being conformed to the ways of an unbelieving world.

If you are still investing your time watching graphic violence or sexual scenes on TV, reading junk novels or looking at pornography, then you are being molded to the pattern of this world. These images lead to thoughts that eventually lead to actions. The efforts of a sinful world to mold you into its image begin before you take the first action.

Be warned. Drinking poison will eventually damage your body or even kill you. Filling your mind with poisonous thoughts will do the same thing. Don't let it.

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Where are you spending your time? What kind of pictures do you have posted inside your locker, stuck in a drawer or hidden in a folder on your computer? If you are open to the ideas, images and advice of an unbelieving world, then you will become just as lost and confused as they are. The influencers in this sinful world want you to open your ears, your eyes and your mouth so they can pour their poisonous mixture into your life. Don't let them.

James 1:14-15 provides a clear picture of the problem caused when we are shaped by the pattern of this world.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Each one of us has desires or needs. We desire acceptance, we desire physical gratification. Satan uses the enticements of the world to draw us away. He draws us into unhealthy relationships where we think we will find acceptance; he passes pornographic images across our eyes that offer some physical satisfaction. These solutions are sinful. They may offer some short-term fulfillment but they lead to death and destruction. James encourages us in verse 16, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren". Don't be fooled by it. Sexual pleasure outside of marriage will not bring long-term happiness or fulfillment. A hit of cocaine will not relieve the pain of abuse for more than a few hours and it leaves you with a gnawing emptiness that is much worse. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world.

Secondly, take the path that God provides to escape the pit of addiction. He calls us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. "Transformed" literally means to undergo metamorphosis. Metamorphosis, as you may recall from high school biology class, is the process that transforms a caterpillar into a butterfly. That is a radical change! And it is the kind of radical conversion that God is able to accomplish in your life through the power of His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe you have been crawling through life on your hands and knees, wallowing in the weeds and dirt like a caterpillar. God wants to give you a new life so you can float above it like a butterfly. Butterflies enjoy a much better life than caterpillars and they have a much better view of the world too. No one tries to burn their house down either. Wouldn't you like to move out of the weeds and into the sky? You will be blessed if you submit to His process of transformation!

How does this change take place? According to Romans 12:2 it is caused by the renewal of our minds. To renew literally means "to renovate". If you have ever renovated a house, you know this isn't a minor change; it is a major overhaul. You may have thought that you needed just a little touch-up in order to fix the problems in your life. You know, just a coat of paint here or there, and hammer in a few loose nails. Not so.

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Imagine living in a home with a leaky roof for ten years. The house has rotten wood in the floors along with a sagging foundation. The plumbing has also started to fail and the wiring is 30 years old. Does this house need a little touch-up or a complete renovation? It needs a complete renovation. So do you.

This old human house is in pretty bad shape! The truth is that all of us suffered from a lack of spiritual attention most of our lives and we have been rotting away because we have taken on the same pattern of thinking and actions of an unbelieving world. We look a lot like the rest of the houses in the neighborhood. In other words, we have been conformed to this world. In order to be truly happy and fulfilled we must be renovated inside-out.

How can we renovate our thinking?

Renovating a house is a process; so is renovating our minds. It takes an investment of time and effort. Our minds are renewed by reading God's Word, studying and praying. As we continue the process of renovation, our thought life is radically changed just as a house is radically changed by the removal of the rotten flooring, crumpling drywall, old appliances, wiring and plumbing.

This process of cleaning and renewing is described another way in Ephesians 5:25- 26. This passage says "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word". In other words, our minds are cleansed by reading the Bible just as our bodies are washed clean in pure water. When you delve into God's Word you are taking a spiritual shower that cleans your heart and mind. You are refreshed. You have new energy. You may even smell better.

You may live or work in a dirty environment where it is hard to get away from the noise, the swearing, the anger and the pride of people who do not know Jesus. However, you can draw aside with Jesus during a private time of day, open your Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to wash you in the water of God's Word. Your spirit and soul will be cleansed and you will feel refreshed.

In this way, God transforms you, and your mind is renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit as He helps you understand His Word.

Reading the Bible brings you closer to Jesus.

This is the primary reason for reading the Bible – to get to know Jesus. According to II Peter 1:3, God has given us *all things* that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him (Jesus) who has called us by glory and virtue.

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God has given us all things we need for life in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is a bold statement but it is true! All we need for life is found in Jesus. It isn't found in a bottle or a pill or a dirty movie. It isn't found in owning more stuff or getting a promotion. It is found in Jesus.

The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like Him.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

II Corinthians 3:18

Isn't this a wonderful picture? As we look into the face of Jesus, we become more like Him. This is a spiritual application of what happened to Moses when he saw God on Mt. Sinai and came down with his face glowing. The more like Jesus we become, the less we care about the addictive thoughts and substances that once held us captive.

The Bible is the most powerful book ever written. It is the living Word of God and we are rewarded for studying it.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

It addresses spiritual and mental issues (divides soul and spirit), physical issues (divides between joint and marrow), and it discerns our true motives (the thoughts and intents of the heart). This is a pretty complete package!.

Studying the Bible is useful.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16-17

God teaches you as you read the Bible; His instruction stops you when you are going astray; it puts you back on the right path, and it keeps you there. The result of your study of God's Word is that you, as a man of God, will be thoroughly prepared for ALL good works.

So, the Bible contains the counsel needed to renew your mind, and God promises that by reading and studying it, He will prepare you for ALL good works. Is kicking addictive behavior a good work? You bet!

Maybe you wonder how reading the Bible can radically change the way you think. You may have read some of the Bible before and it didn't seem to be quite as powerful as these verses describe it to be. I have some good news. Jesus Christ sent someone to bring it to life for you.

The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible.

Before He went to the cross, Jesus promised to send another counselor or helper just like Him to guide you into all truth. Your helper is the Holy Spirit.

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

John 14:26

Jesus did not save you and leave you to do the best you can. He never intended for you to fight the battle against sin on your own. He sent the Holy Spirit to counsel and comfort you. According to John 14:16-17, the Holy Spirit dwells in you if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. The passage in John 14:26 says that the Holy Spirit helps you understand the Bible. He brings it to life. As you seek counsel in God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to help you, He will teach you all things and bring to mind the scripture passages that will lead you in making good decisions, and your thought-life is radically changed.

As Hebrews 4:12 says, this isn't a dead book, it is THE living Word. Nothing is more powerful than God's Word when you are seeking His will in making decisions, in finding the proper instruction for righteousness, to equip you for all good works, or to understand the motives and thoughts in your heart. Sixty minutes of reading His Word and praying on your bed is worth infinitely more than paying to listen to the advice of worldly counselors who do not have the mind of Christ. So, if you want to change the way you think, ask the Lord to give you understanding in His Word, then open it and read.

God also gives us Godly people to help transform us.

As the Lord directs us, we are able to counsel one another. According to Colossians 2:9-10, all of the fullness we need is found in Jesus Christ and we are complete, fully supplied in Him!

For in Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Colossians 2:9-10

The word translated "complete" in this verse is most often translated "fulfill" in the New Testament. You are fulfilled in Christ. You are not fulfilled in drugs, alcohol, sexual relationships or by reading the latest pop-psychology book. You are fulfilled and complete in Christ. This fulfillment enables us to counsel each other according the Word of God.

Thank God that He provides Godly people to counsel us from His Word. I have benefited many times from the counsel of men who know the Lord and are students of the Bible.

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Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Romans 15:14

Godly counsel keeps you on the straight path and brings you to the place God wants you to live.

And God uses our experiences with Him to transform each other.

The trials in your life are not wasted. In fact, as you and I walk with the Lord, He uses our experiences to encourage those who are enduring the same trials. Because of your experiences, you are able to see the problem through the eyes of the one currently going through it. You are able to relate, you empathize with them, and you can extend the grace that God has given you to others who need it too.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. II Corinthians 1:3-4

You can encourage, comfort and strengthen others with the comfort you have received from God. As you encourage or disciple people who are struggling with addiction, be sure to continually direct them to Jesus Christ. He is the God of all comfort. Pray with them and pray for them. Lead them to the Bible for answers.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ transforms your life. He began by shedding His blood for your and my sins so that we could be forgiven. Because of the blood of Jesus, you can be saved for eternity! Thank God that He didn't stop there. He gives you new life in this world (II Corinthians 5:17). And He sent the Holy Spirit to counsel, comfort and to change the way you think as you read the Bible and walk with Jesus. This is vital as you kick addictions and start enjoying the new, abundant life that Jesus Christ has to offer. God who has power over death and life also has power over the sins that would set you back.

Do not be conformed to this world. Ask the Lord to show you how to avoid being shaped by the ways of the world. Ask yourself how you are affected by the shows you watch on TV? By the magazines and books you read, or the Internet sites you visit? Ask the Lord to convict you of sin in the areas that are harmful to you, and follow the Apostle Paul's plea not to be conformed to the pattern of this world.

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. By reading through this chapter, you have already begun the process transforming your life by the renewal of your mind. Continue to focus on the things of the Lord (Colossians 3:1-2). Pray, meditate upon His Word and ask the Lord to show you how to apply the scripture verses in this lesson. Please, please, please pick up your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and read 2-4 chapters every day.

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Free to Live a New Life In Christ



Changing the way we think: Being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Assignment 1

Name: _____

1. Have you ever been through a rehabilitation program? As you can see in chapter one, God offers us something deeper and more effective. He offers transformation. What is the difference between rehabilitation and transformation? _____

2. Are you are still actively engaged in sinful addictions? Do you still think about it on a regular basis? If so, you are still going the wrong way. Romans 12:1-2 tells you how to turn things around. Write this passage here: _____

3. Are you engaged in any activities that might cause you to be shaped by the thinking of this world (through movies or programs, books or magazines, music or programs you listen to, ungodly counsel you receive)? _____

4. Romans 12:2 tells us what we should do instead of being shaped by the influences of the world. It says that we should be transformed by renewing or renovating our mind. How can you start the process of renewing or renovating your mind this week? _____

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Write down an action that you can take today to start this process. _____

5. James 1:14-15 tells us that everyone faces temptation. Who is the tempter and what can we do about him? _____

6. The call to resist temptation and to be transformed by the renewal of your mind is tough. Did Jesus Christ leave you to live this life on your own? _____

If not, then who did He send and how does He help you? (Hint: consider what you are taught by John 14:16 & 14:26). _____

7. Read Hebrews 4:12 and II Timothy 3:16-17. In your own words, tell me what these verses mean to you as you fight the battle against addiction? _____

Once you complete this worksheet, mail it to:

Free In Christ Prison Ministries
PO Box 1492
Yanceyville, NC 27379

Or send it to your group leader at the address they provide.