

Conquering Sinful Habits

I'm struggling with a sinful habit that I haven't been able to conquer. Is there hope for me?

A) I have good news for you—you can have victory over your sinful habit! Consider the following scripture:

(1) “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13, NASB).

B) This verse contains several encouraging truths:

(1) You are not alone. Satan will tell you that you're the only person who struggles with a particular sinful habit. Nothing could be further from the truth—others have faced the same kind of temptation that you're facing. Even Jesus faced the temptations that we struggle with. Hebrews 4:15 tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (NASB).

(2) You are able to resist. God is faithful—He will not allow you to face a temptation that is beyond your ability to resist. Satan will tell you that the habit you're struggling with can't be overcome. He will tell you that past defeat equals future failure. Don't believe him! He's lying to you. Instead believe what Philippians 4:13 says: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (NASB).

(3) You are able to endure. Trials and temptations are not something that can be brushed aside. Their purpose is to build character and spiritual muscle. We often want God to simply take our temptations away. But that does not help us in the long run. God's “way of escape” is found through the effort of endurance.

What is the biblical method for conquering sinful habits?

A) The first step to victory over a sinful habit is to examine your thinking and ask God to reveal any lies that Satan may have planted in your mind. Consider the following lies that people believe about conquering sinful habits:

(1) I can conquer this habit on my own. There's nothing Satan likes better than for you to try living the Christian life in your own strength. Jesus told his disciples, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NASB).

(2) I've failed so many times—I'll never be free from this sinful habit. If Satan can convince you of this, he's got you beat. God's word says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, NASB). Remember this: life is a series of choices. At each decision point, you have the ability, through God's grace, to choose to do what is right. A life of victory is lived one decision at a time (Romans 6:7, 11, 14, 17–18; 8:37; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

(3) It's OK if I have one bad habit—after all, nobody's perfect. This is one of Satan's favorite lies. If you allow Satan to have one stronghold in your life, sin will inevitably spread into other areas. God's word says, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?" (1 Corinthians 5:6, ESV). "As the one who called you is holy, you yourselves be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15, ESV).

B) The next step to victory is to recognize the enormity of what is at stake—this is a battle for your soul. Remember Charles Dickens' story called A Christmas Carol? The main character, Scrooge, was consumed by selfishness and greed. But all that changed in a single night. How? Three spirits visited Scrooge and made him think about three important questions:

- (1) What have I lost in the past because of this sinful habit?
- (2) What am I losing right now because of this sinful habit?
- (3) What will I lose in the future because of this sinful habit?

Use the "Scrooge Principle for Conquering Sinful Habits" handout and answer these three questions for yourself. Review your answers on a regular basis so you can be reminded of the importance of obedience. Jesus once asked, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36, NASB).

C) The next step to victory is to examine and manage your environment (home, job, car, friends, etc.) and remove anything that triggers your area of weakness. Break off contact with anyone who would draw you back into sinful behavior. Romans 13:14 warns us, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires" (NET).

- (1) If you struggle with pornography, get an internet filter and give the password to your spouse. If this is not enough, get rid of your internet connection completely (iPhones, iPads, etc.).
- (2) If you struggle with gluttony, stop buying junk food. Go through the kitchen/refrigerator and remove anything that you shouldn't be eating.

(3) If you struggle with smoking, get rid of all your cigarettes and avoid any store where you regularly purchased them.

(4) If you struggle with anger or worry, give your time, money and possessions to God. Release your right of ownership and commit to trusting Him for your needs. Identify your emotional triggers and preempt them where possible. (5) If you struggle with lust, get rid of anything that stimulates lustful thinking—TV, DVDs, magazines, etc.

D) The next step to victory is to renew your mind by memorizing and meditating on Scripture. The power of God’s Word to conquer sinful habits is emphasized in Psalm 119:9–11: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You” (NASB). You can learn more about how to do this in the lesson called “The Fifth Essential—Memorizing and Meditating on Scripture.” Consider the following plan a “prescription” for helping to cure sinful habits:

(1) Search out Bible verses that relate to your area of temptation. Write these down on 3x5 cards and use them each day. Along with the verse, write down a prayer that reflects the truth of the verse. For example, suppose you are struggling with worry:

(a) A verse that will help renew your mind would be Matthew 6:30–31: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’” (NASB).

(b) A prayer that reflects the truth of this verse could be: “Father, you told me that you care for something as temporary and trivial as the grass of the field. How much more do you care for me! I believe what you have said and I purpose, through your grace, to stop worrying and trust you for the future.”

(2) In the morning, read your memory card(s) and pray before you begin your day. Ask God to give you His grace (the desire and power to do His will), and to help you resist temptation until lunch time. Throughout the morning, meditate on the truth of the Scriptures you have memorized.

(a) It is important to understand that you “grow” in grace. This means that every time you resist temptation and choose to obey, your desire and will to do right grows. When you yield to temptation, you resist God’s grace and your desire and will to do right shrinks (Hebrews 12:15).

(3) At lunch time, repeat the process. Ask God again to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until dinner time.

(4) At dinner time, repeat the process. Ask God again to give you His grace and help you resist temptation until bed time.

(5) At bed time, review your day: Did you say ‘No!’ to the devil and resist temptation? If you failed, ask God to forgive you and determine to obey tomorrow. Read over your verse again and ask God to guard your mind while you sleep. The best thing to have on your mind as you go to sleep is God’s Word.

(6) Commit to following this “prescription” for at least 30 days (60 days is even better).

E) The last step to victory is to find a fellow Christian to whom you can be accountable. Humble yourself and confess your sin to them (Proverbs 28:13; James 5:16). Ask them to enter into a commitment of accountability with you. This means that they will ask you each week (or each day) whether or not you have resisted temptation in a specific area. This commitment will give you added motivation to resist the Devil. We are not meant to live the Christian life apart from the help and encouragement of the church. That is why accountability to other believers is so important (cf. Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:23–25; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 6:1–2).

(1) Select this person with care. They should be mature in the faith and respected as a person of integrity by other Christians. They should be someone you would never think of deceiving, and the thought of telling them that you have sinned should be embarrassing enough to help motivate you to resist temptation. They should also be someone that you can call during the week if you’re really struggling with temptation.

Some people are instantly freed from their sinful habits when they are saved. Others are not. Why?

A) We began this lesson by looking at 1 Corinthians 10:13. In this verse God promises that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to resist. When certain people are saved, God supernaturally removes all desire for the sinful habit(s) they had as a sinner. He does this because He knows it is necessary for them—they have so damaged their will that they are not able to handle temptation in that area.

B) When you hear about someone who has experienced miraculous deliverance from a sinful habit, it is easy to be discouraged about your own struggles. But remember this: a person who experiences miraculous deliverance in one or two areas of life does not experience deliverance from temptation in all other areas of life. Just because they no longer struggle with cocaine or alcohol addiction does not mean they never struggle with anger or lust. In other areas of temptation they must do exactly what you do—resist the Devil and say ‘No!’ to temptation.

The Scrooge Principle for Conquering Sinful Habits

Past

What have I lost in the past because of this sinful habit?

Present

What am I losing in the present because of this sinful habit?

Future

What will I lose in the future because of this sinful habit?