

Journey To Freedom

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2013

Introduction

Some time ago my son Evan stepped on some glass. It wasn't his fault. He couldn't get it out by himself. His mother bandaged the wound, but a piece of glass had become lodged *in* his foot, so he came to me. I opened the wound fairly deeply and peered into the tissue of his foot. A triangle of glass about 1/3 of an inch long could be seen glimmering deep inside. I knew taking it out would be painful, so I asked him, "Do you want *me* to try to get it out?" He looked at me with confidence and said, "Yes, Dad. It needs to come out now because my friend got some glass stuck in his hand, never could get it out, and it's caused him problems for years since then."

I instructed him to hold the chair armrests and bite down on a piece of cloth. I spread the muscle and skin apart and painstakingly pulled this glass out of his foot. The pain was so intense Evan had sweat and tears running down his face. When I was done, I asked him, "Are you okay?" He tearfully and haltingly replied, "Yes, Dad. *Now* I am!"

The process of removing the root of his trouble was painful even for me, but now he is free from it. I hope we can do the same with the addictions or bondages that are infecting your life. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, and deceitful are the kisses of the enemy." Our enemy

Satan wants us to stay sick but comfortable. Jesus Christ wants us to be well!

Many years ago a young medic in training was called on to treat a soldier who had been horribly wounded by shrapnel¹. The patient was stable but in extreme pain. The medic began the difficult and painful process of removing the fragments, while the patient cursed and screamed in pain. The pain became so intense he begged the medic to stop. The medic sympathetically stopped digging for the deepest pieces and only removed those which were easily reached. He then washed the wounds, bandaged the patient and reported to his superior.

The senior teaching medic swore at the young, inexperienced medic, “You just sentenced that man to death! The fragments left in him will infect, abscess and cause him to die.

“What should I do?” the young medic asked. “Remove the bandages again and work at it until you get all the shrapnel out. He will probably hate you so bad by the time you are done, he may want to kill you, but by doing this you *will* be able to save him so he won’t die!” the senior medic replied.

I hope, as my reader, you will recognize the wounds in your life and allow me, as a spiritual medic, to help you get the shrapnel out. The process may be painful and you may even hate *me* as we travel through this book. I don’t mind you hating me. I didn’t write this book to get you to like me; I wrote it to help you get the infection of sinful addictions or bondages out of your life. If I can accomplish this, you will not only be healthy spiritually, but happy emotionally and *free* to live the life God has planned for you.

¹ Fragments from an exploded artillery shell, mine or bomb

Chapter 1

Where It All Started

Nine years old. The painful memory clings to my mind. Mom and Dad went out. I knew the babysitter well. He'd watched me before, but this time he did something to me I could never understand. I can't remember how he got me in that room alone with him. He told me if I didn't do what he said, he'd tell my parents I had done something that was so terrible I would get in HUGE trouble. I had no idea he was manipulating me. I was afraid of getting in trouble. The fear and manipulation drove me to capitulate. I felt sick with fear and disgust. How could someone I trusted do this to me?

No one was going to know. I wasn't about to tell. I felt

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dirty, guilty and unlovable. I felt like I had no value and began to treat people around me wrongly. In school, I sometimes beat up other kids just for fun. I didn't show my anger at home so much, but at school I was a mean, tough kid. I remember tripping a kid named Andrew over and over

till he finally fought me. Then, I beat him up really bad. I hurt so bad inside that I wanted other people to hurt as well.

As a result of the abuse and other choices I made, I soon became horribly addicted to pornography.

When I was in seventh grade, some girls asked me to do wrong things with them, things only married people should do together. When I refused, they called me horrible names and put me out of their group. I was an outcast.

One day my father gave me a book to read named, "The Pilgrim's Progress." The story fascinated and intrigued me so much that I eventually ended up reading it about seven times. I remember asking my dad one day, "How do I get there? How do I start the journey?" I was asking about the way to heaven, the "Celestial City" described in the book. I wanted to travel the same *physical* road to the Celestial City that the character in the book had traveled, but I didn't really understand how to enter in at the "straight gate." My dad tried to explain to me that this was a spiritual journey, not a physical one, but I really didn't understand.

I went to a very legalistic church that continually taught us we were sinful. I learned this by hearing the Ten Commandments *every* Sunday. This church, through teaching and preaching, told me *over and over* again about the sin problems I had, but they told me precious little about solutions to them. I read some gospel tracts that suggested I "accept the Lord." I tried "accepting" Him like I heard many people say they had done, but it never seemed to do anything lasting for me.

I understood that I had broken many of the Ten Commandments.² I had stolen, lied, hated people, dishonored my parents and used God's name as a curse word. I learned that every time I sinned³, it was like picking up a rock and tossing it into a backpack I was wearing. I would have to

² Exodus 20

³ Broke God's law known as the 10 Commandments

carry the weight of that sin till my dying day unless I could find someone else to carry the backpack for me, or someone who could cut the straps of the backpack and release me from this sin.

The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof is destruction.”⁴ I was headed for destruction.

When I was about sixteen years old, I went to an event sponsored by a local church in Brantford Ontario. The pastor had a vision to see many people changed by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The event was named “For God and Country.” The choir and band were rehearsed and ready. The church rented the local high-school’s stadium to allow for the expected thousand people to attend.

I had to work that day, but after work, while still in my dirty work clothes, I went to see this renowned Canadian evangelist. The day had strangely turned so cold it felt like snow was possible. The wind was so strong and cutting that as the choir sang you could see their lips move, but couldn’t even hear their words.

I don’t remember much of what was said during the meeting, but at one point the special speaker said, “If you have a load of sin on your back and you want to get rid of it, repent (turn away) from sin and turn to God. Put your faith and trust in the person of Jesus Christ.” He explained how Jesus lived a sinless (perfect) life and then was crucified⁵ to make payment for our sins. God’s anger toward our sin was satisfied by the (substitutionary)⁶ death of His own Son. If we would put our faith in Christ to pay the penalty for our sin, we could be saved.⁷

⁴ Proverbs 14:12

⁵ Put to death by being nailed to a cross

⁶ To be put in the place of someone else

⁷ Forgiven of all sin and in right relationship with God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and the only true God.

At the close of the meeting, he invited people to respond to the message, but I was embarrassed to go forward, as I was in my dirty work clothes. A lady I knew, Jenny Fleet, saw me standing there after the meeting ended and asked if I wanted to respond to the message. I told her I didn't want to respond because I was so dirty from working. She assured me there was nothing to fear and brought me over to the evangelist.

After a short conversation, I repented of my sin and put my faith in Jesus Christ. In a few moments, the weight of my sin felt like it was gone. I felt free as a deer running across an open field. The day I was born. I obviously don't remember, but the day I was forgiven for all my sin, I'll never forget.

For about two years it felt like I lived in a greenhouse.⁸ The winds of temptation seemed to be gone. The light of God's Word was shining on my heart, and I was regularly sharing my faith with others. I felt like I was free from the penalty of sin, and I seemed to be free from *habitual* sin in general.

When I got to be about 18, it seemed some of the panes of glass in my greenhouse began to get broken. The cold winds of temptation blew once again into my life. I wondered why God was allowing this to happen. He helped me understand later, "Lloyd, I want you to be strong like an oak tree. Oak trees can begin growing in a greenhouse, but they can't stay there. They need to be where they can grow large and strong. The testing and trials of all types of weather are part of the growing process. When people want a valuable wood, they choose oak. You are a valuable person, and I want to make you strong and tall in the spirit realm."

⁸ Place where tender plants can grow without the harsh weather damaging them

Sadly, as the temptations came I slowly began to reconsider the life of sin I had left behind, and I started getting tangled up in viewing pornography again.

I remember thinking “If I could just get married, all my troubles will be over.” Marriage seemed like it would be so great. I figured the difficulty with an impure thought life would be over. With an outlet for my passion, everything would be fine.

My wife Cathy was and is as pure as the driven snow in most every way, especially when it came to things like pornography. (Her name even means pure one.) She had never viewed it and had no idea how damaging this stuff could be to a marriage. She was (and still is) a great wife, and we’ve had and still have a great relationship, but being married didn’t “solve” the problem.

When our first daughter was one year old, we went to Holland for a vacation. We toured many places that were beautiful, but also toured the red-light (prostitute) district in Amsterdam. This place was terrible. It showed so much sexual sin. “Anything” goes there. As we toured that area, the Lord seemed to tap me on the shoulder and say, “Is this what you want?” I sadly thought, “No, Lord.” I was sorry for even looking at this stuff. God was beginning to change my mind about this sin. When I looked at the effects of sexual sin on people, it helped me to *begin* to despise that activity.

For the first 20 years of married life, I traveled full time with my wife and her family in gospel music ministry. When we got home from that trip to Europe, the first church we went to was in Punxsutawney Pennsylvania. During that first church service, I remember going down from the platform to pray for a lady. I found out from her husband that she was deeply depressed and discouraged. She felt like giving up on life.

My struggle with addiction had so discouraged me that I rarely even smiled anymore. As I started praying I thought, “God, you sure have a sense of humor. I must be the most depressed and discouraged person here. Now you want me to pray for *them!*” With no faith or expectation, I began to pray and few moments later, a miracle happened. I felt all *my* discouragement and sadness leave *me* and I began to be filled with an incredible joy. I looked over to see the lady crying as well. I went to the back of the church to process what was happening. I knew God had supernaturally taken away my sadness, but what had happened to her? After a few minutes, I found the courage to ask her, “What happened to you when we prayed?” She joyfully replied, “All my discouragement is gone!”

As the meeting progressed, we had opportunity for

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people to tell what had happened to them during the prayer time. I could almost hear the devil say, “Don’t you tell anyone what has happened, as it might not last.” I immediately felt a warning from the Holy Spirit saying, “You need to testify⁹ to “cement” what God has done in you. I did, and although that was not the “freedom” I kept, it was a foretaste of the freedom I eventually found and have treasured for the last twenty years.

A few years later we had our second daughter, Katelynn. Our children brought me much joy, but I couldn’t seem to get free from the sadness brought on by the impurity

⁹ Tell about what happened to me

in my thought life. I became more and more discouraged and depressed.

The Bible says, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.”¹⁰ I was frustrated with that scripture. I thought, “Christianity doesn’t seem to work for me.” It seemed like every other Christian had their life in order, but I felt like a hypocrite because of my addiction. My discouragement caused me to despair sometimes – even of my life itself. I grew increasingly sad and rarely smiled. The only things that made me smile were my daughters and wife. Occasionally someone would ask me, “Why don’t you ever smile?” My answer, “I have nothing to smile about!” I was so deceived, not counting the many blessings I had, as well as thinking I could never get free from this sin.

I just want to make a point here: If you are bound by some addiction or bondage *before* getting married, you will be bound *after* you get married. Marriage may complicate your addiction. The person you marry usually has things that they struggle with as well. Getting married doesn’t fix your problems. I encourage you to diligently work at getting free from addictions and bondage *before* getting married!

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV

Study Questions

Chapter 1 – Where It All Started

1. Abuse is a common thing. Most abuse happens in our homes. Have you ever been abused physically, verbally or sexually? How did it make you feel? Have you dealt with this? How?
2. Most people who have inner pain “medicate” with something. Do you find yourself “medicating” with a substance or activity?
3. When Lloyd was sixteen, he reached a turning point, turning away from sin and putting his faith in Jesus Christ. Have you ever made that decision? If not, would you like to? Ask a Christian friend right now how to do this.
4. Lloyd thought marriage would solve his addiction. Have you ever thought a certain event in your life would change everything? Did it?