"Breaking Free of Addiction"
Unbound Series, Part 1

When I was a little kid, I was obsessed with Kung Fu movies. I begged my parents to enroll me in martial arts and to this day I think putting your kid in martial arts is one of the best decisions you can do. Even if it is for a short amount of time. I practiced Tae Kwon Do for about three years before we moved to another city and stopped pursuing it. I had a lot of fun and remember winning a few tournaments but there was one memory that still makes me laugh. We did a Christmas party one year with all the teachers and students at a very large house. One of the older ladies in the martial arts class was married to a Hollywood producer. He did films like "Look Whose Talking." Needless to say, the house was massive. I remember being in the living room with a few friends from class and looking down at the coffee table. On the table were those little Andes chocolate mint candies. I have never had them before. So, I tried one. And then another. I was raised to be respectful and thoughtful so I already knew that I should only have one or two of these chocolates. If I ate more, it would be rude and disrespectful. I was convinced of this. However, I could not stop eating this chocolate. I think I almost ate the entire bowl. I wasn't listening to the conversation or paying attention to anything except those chocolates. I must have only been 9 or so at the time and I can vividly remember talking to myself saying, "Rudy stop eating these, it is so rude." Then I started saying a different thing to myself. I said, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I stop?"

I don't know about you, but there have been multiple times in my life where I said, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I stop?" I have even prayed in times past "God, can you please remove this desire from my heart? I don't want to do this sin anymore and I can't stop; can you please just take the desire away from me?" How awesome would it be if God answered these kinds of prayers? How much easier would life be if God just removed a sinful or bad desire form our hearts instantaneously? Now, if you are laughing it's because you know by experience that God doesn't work like that.

So many believers have battled sin, addiction, and bad habits and remain in a place of discouragement because they are not living the life of freedom given by Jesus. This topic has been on my heart the last few weeks, so I began writing this sermon titled, "Breaking Free of Addiction." In the process of my prayer and research, I discovered I have a lot to say on the matter. I didn't intend for this to be a series but the more I studied and prayed the more I saw a clear series. So, in the next seven weeks, we are going to walk through the series titled "Unbound" and discover how we can walk in the freedom Jesus gave us. The Apostle Paul said this in Galatians 5:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. – Galatians 5:1 NASB1995

Everyone battles something they wish was removed from their lives. It may be an addiction to bad food. It could be an addiction to screens. You are on your phone, tablet, or computer six hours a day. It could be an addiction to pornography or something even more harmful like substance abuse. Allow to give one Christian definition of addiction I found in a textbook this past week:

"An addiction is any pleasure that becomes an obsession (a mental preoccupation) which often then results in a compulsion (a behavior that acts out the obsession). Addictions can be chemically based, but they can also be emotionally or behaviorally based as well. An addiction is not a disease. You can't catch an addiction. An addiction is anything we depend on that draws us away from giving greater dependence on God. An addiction is not trusting in the sufficiency of Christ. An addiction is a false god. An addiction is an idol."

The bottom line is that addiction is not the will of God for your life. Whatever you are addicted to is both a god in your life and something that becomes your master. We are not to be mastered by sin but to overcome it. Addiction is similar to the ancient battle of having no other gods before Him. Addictions are idols. They are false gods. They promise to make you happy, feel better, and find the relief you are desperately looking for. Jesus does the same, but for some reason we are convinced the addiction will give us something better and more instantaneous than what Jesus can.

Addiction can be chemical, triggered by childhood trauma, or fear based. The bottom line is that rather than addressing the underlying issue or the root cause, people cover it up and numb the pain with the addiction of their choice. If you are battling some form of addiction or sin, you are not alone. The Apostle Paul famously said this in Romans 7:

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. – Romans 7:15-17 NASB1995

Let me just say that I am approaching this topic both as a preacher and a Biblical counselor. I am obviously not a professional therapist or psychiatrist. I believe in counselors, but I also believe the Bible is fully sufficient to handle all of our counseling needs. Today I want to look to the Scriptures and then give some practical encouragement. Let me say the seven points I have today are going to become the seven next parts to this series. If you have your Bibles, go with me to the book of James. It is found towards the end of your Bibles. When we read this passage, you are going to be thinking, "How does this relate to addiction?" I will explain in just a minute. James chapter 4 and we are going to begin in verse 1:

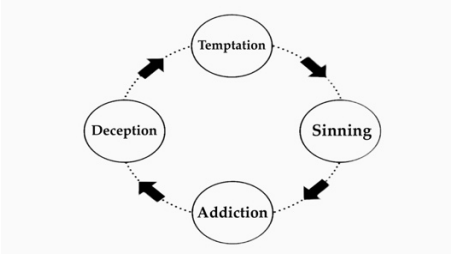
What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-

minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. – James 4:1-10 NASB1995

First, I want you to notice that James asks the question, "Where does all this evil come from?" Notice there are desires that we have, and we can look for them in the world or in God. If we become friends with the world we have become an enemy to God. Second, I want to focus on a massively key word here. The word is found in verse 7. It says "Submit" therefore to God. One pastor said this that really challenged me:

"Addiction is the physical consequence to a constant yielding to temptation."

I hope you are catching on to the theme I am presenting here. Part of why we get addicted to certain things is because we have stopped surrendering to God and began to surrender or yield to temptation. Addiction has a process. It begins with deception, then temptation, then acting in sin, then sinning habitual and consciously, finally there is full blown addiction:



Why is addiction so attractive? Because addiction is saying, "If you do this you can rest. If you do this, you will forget about your pain. If you do this, you will be satisfied." When the truth is, you can only find these things in God's presence. Proverbs 19:23, "The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil."

I hope you have your notes because I have a lot of information for you this morning. Let me encourage you with a few things here that will help you leave a life of addiction and surrender to the will of God.

STEP #1 - <u>Presence</u> – Welcome God into the physical and spiritual.

In Exodus 33, Moses is on a mountain top with the glory of God, and his prayer was simple yet powerful. Moses said, "Lord, if Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us from here." For Moses, his cry was "If God isn't leading then I am not moving." Imagine if we applied that to what we are addicted to. It would sound something like, "God, I need You in this addiction. Lead me and I will follow. But I don't want to take a step without You and Your direction."

There is also a big issue in the battle between the physical and the spiritual. Some people think that addiction is all in the physical and needs to be treated in the physical. Others think addiction is purely spiritual and needs to be fought spiritually. I think it needs to both. We need to take care of our soul, but the Bible is clear our physical bodies are our temple, and we need to take care it as well. Let me just say that some of us can be too focused on the physical and completely miss

the spiritual while others are way too spiritual and leave out the physical entirely. I have a sermon in my back pocket I haven't pulled the trigger on called "Deliver me from Deliverance." I believe in deliverance but on the basis that we have been delivered by Jesus. We are fighting the influence of the enemy and our bad decisions not the "power" of the enemy. If we are not careful, we can blame everything on a demon and excuse away our bad decisions.

STEP #2 - <u>Perspective</u> – Create a vision for your life.

We all know Proverbs 29:18 that says without vision (or revelation) the people perish. But we can't forget Proverbs 16:9 that says, "A man's heart plans his ways but the LORD determines his steps." You need a vision for your life without addiction. What would your life look like if you were not struggling with that addiction? But it can't stop there. You will have more time in your day when you are not enslaved by an addiction. What are you going to do with that time? What are you going to fill the void with when you are no longer struggling with that addiction? What can you do now that you couldn't do while you were addicted. I encourage you if you are struggling today with any form of addiction to seek the Lord and have a vision casting party. Seriously. Grab a notepad and seek the Lord to guide you with a fresh vision.

STEP #3 - <u>Provision</u> – Don't give the enemy a foothold.

John, forgive me for what I am about to say right now. I'm so glad I don't live in Australia. I don't have anything against the people or the country. I have a real problem with the nuclear bugs and animals they have there. I saw a post the other day on the spiders in Australia. Have you seen the spiders in Australia? If you don't know, the spiders in Australia are huge and I believe they organize themselves in local street gangs. There's a reason I have never moved to Australia. I can't even sleep at night if I see an American spider. I live by a motto in my household. If I see a large bug, "it has to die before I get some shuteye." You think I am going to start settling into bed, see the largest roach in the world on my wall and then say, "Welp nighty night." Nope! Roachy boy needs to die.

Most of us in this room won't tolerate a pest that made it inside the house. I am talking about bugs and rats when I say pests not extended family by the way. We won't tolerate pests at all in our homes so why do we tolerate the enemy's influence. Remember I said addiction has a process. It begins with deception, then temptation, then acting in sin, then sinning habitual and consciously, finally there is full blown addiction. If we fight the devil at the deception stage, if we don't tolerate him right at the beginning, we will never get to addiction.

STEP #4 - <u>Position</u> – Evaluate your surrender – what are you yielding to?

You need to pre-decide that you will not engage with the enemy not bow to his temptation. Obviously, there are sins of commission and omission. Some sins you don't realize you are doing. But most sin we know exactly what we are doing. When you choose to sin, you are actually surrendering or yielding to the devil. Rather than surrender to the Lord and His will, you are bowing to the influence of the enemy. This is why actively growing in your surrender to the Lord is so vital when battling addiction.

STEP #5 - <u>Partnership</u> – Don't fight alone.

This past week I was finishing up my last micro-project for my degree. I interviewed five pastors with twenty questions on church revitalization. It was fascinating. I joked with one of them saying, "After this interview, I feel like I have been to both a conference and counseling." It was so good. I learned so much. And then I was convicted. I said to myself after the interview, "Why have I not picked up the phone and called one of these pastors before? Why haven't I called and said, "Hey I am launching this new ministry, can you give me any advice?" We can get so much further together rather than alone. The same is true for addiction. I highly encouraged you, no I challenge you, if you are battling any form of addiction, see a professional Christian counselor. If you need a reference, I can give you a male and female contact. Welcome your closet Christian friend into your battle. Galatians 6:2 says that we are to "bear one another's burdens."

STEP #6 - <u>Plan</u> – What are your goals?

You may have heard of the acronym SMART Goals which stands for "Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound." Let me give you an example. I am very strict with keeping a Sabbath to rest. I am also strict on avoiding doing chores or working past 6pm. After six I spend time with Nikki and do other things not related to work or to do lists. But sometimes I am done with everything by 6 and don't fall asleep until like 11pm so I am bored out of my mind. Not only that, but I also feel like I am wasting time. So, I got an iPad so I could download books. I have not been reading a lot of books lately because of school. I am just overwhelmed with study and reading. I feel like it is all I do. So, I challenged myself to get a wide range of books that get me thinking. I bought a book called the "Comedy Bible." I have purchased several books on addiction and pastoral counseling. I challenged myself to read for an hour once I am done for the day. So, my goal was specific (start reading again), measurable (read once a day), achievable (an hour a day won't kill me), relevant (helps my life, ministry, and relationships), and time-bound (one hour a day).

STEP #7 - <u>Power</u> – Be a victor not a victim.

Whether the addiction you are battling is due to a chemical imbalance or bad decisions, you are still not a victim. You are a child of God who has been clothed with power from on high and anointed to bring good news. Whatever you are facing is not bigger than God. Whatever you are going through, God has fully equipped you for victory. If you have been blood bought, you can walk out the freedom Jesus gave. Let me close with this benediction of sorts:

31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. – John 8:31-36 NASB1995