



LIVING LIBERATED

**Are we bound forever to vices,
bad habits, addictions, and
other sins that shackle and put
us in bondage?**

**Today we can learn HOW to free
ourselves from that bondage by
the power of Jesus Christ!**

Steve Flatt

TAKING STEPS TO FREEDOM

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"They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity---for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." (2 Peter 2:19) Listen to that last sentence again. "For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

Not long ago the New York Times carried an article about addictions, and the whole premise was that Americans seem hooked on this idea of addiction. Not too long ago, you only heard the idea of addiction mentioned with regard to drugs and alcohol. Now it says that there are addictions to all kinds of things, food, cigarettes, exercise, relationships, shopping, work, sex and video games. In fact, there's now a monthly publication called, Lifeline America, that focuses on nothing except our addictions. There are over 200 different kinds of addiction support groups meeting throughout the country.

Many if not most of us tend to be addicted to something. There is something that literally has a mastery of or a control over our lives. You may be into one of the new ones, or you may be victim to one of the oldies, like drinking. Over 18,000,000 Americans are problem drinkers. It disrupts their lives and their families. Surely some of us are addicted to eating, I don't mean for livelihood, but for pleasure. Did you know that Americans are 2.3 billion pounds overweight? What is your addiction? What is your life-controlling vice? Whatever it is, I want to share with you seven steps to freedom.

1) Freedom starts today.

Freedom starts today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next month. Have you ever noticed how many more people go on a diet tomorrow instead of today? I love what Solomon says in Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." In other words, quit telling yourself, "one of these days." The truth is, it's going to be harder to change tomorrow than it is today, because delay always makes the problem worse. Begin today.

"Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 11:4) In other words, don't get distracted. Don't make excuses, the greater the delay, the bigger the problem. So, step one is, freedom has got to start today. Don't put off until tomorrow what can be started today.

2) Refuse to blame others.

Refuse to blame others. You'll never get out of your addiction until you refuse to blame others. But this old cover of "alibiing" is as old as Adam and Eve. Do you remember? Adam sinned and blamed his wife; Eve sinned and blamed the snake, serpent, But the point is we tend to want to blame somebody else. I'll never get better until I take personal responsibility. It's my life, I make choices.

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible states. "Let each one carry his own load." (Galatians 6:5) It's talking about personal responsibility. It's not saying we don't help one another. Because three verses earlier, it says "to bear one another's burdens, so fulfill the law of Christ." But I am responsible for me and you are responsible for you.

"Do not be deceived: God will not be mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7) Who are you blaming for your big problem in life? Are you blaming your parents, your husband, your wife, your teacher or your boss? Or are you blaming the devil? Are you blaming God? To break free, you must take responsibility for your life then you will not seek a remedy to your problem. Stop excusing yourself and stop accusing other people. Refuse to blame others.

3) Examine your life.

Take a personal inventory of your life. Do a frank evaluation. Ask some tough questions: What is my addiction? Why do I have it? When did it start? How frequently do I fall victim to it? When are the situations in which I'm tempted most? Why am I afraid to do something about it? It's hard to ask those questions, but they must be asked if we are to correct our problem.

"Let us examine our ways and test them and return to the Lord." (Lamentations 3:40) To change we have to stop pretending. We can't cover up our faults. We must come face to face with them. The fact is, hiding our hurt only intensifies it and makes it worse. Denial prevents healing.

"For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'-and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalms 32:4, 5) David said, I wouldn't face my problem, and I was drying up.

David examined his own life, and when he did, he came clean before the Lord. It was like lancing a boil. All of a sudden, he felt this freeing relief. Examine your life. Let me tell you something, that's not a once in a lifetime thing. We need to be examining our lives regularly because vice, addiction and other sins will insidiously creep in and control you before you even know it.

4) Employ Christ's sovereignty.

Christ is waiting to help. Employ his sovereignty - you can't do it alone. You need a power greater than yourself. Why don't you go straight to the source and get the greatest power? "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life." (Roman 6:12, 13)

For a man is a slave to whatever masters him. So, you are a slave. Romans 6:20 states, you're either a slave to sin, or you're a slave to righteousness. The bottom line is we all really are a slave. But the good news is, you can choose your master. "Submit yourselves, then, to the Lord." (James 4:7) The solution to your addiction is to choose the right master. Every day you're controlled by something. You're controlled by a bottle or by a pill. Many are controlled by other people. You may be controlled by the thirst for power, you may be controlled by food. But you are going to have to serve something. Why not choose the right master? God says, "Let me be sovereign."

Often, we only want to give God the problem. We say to God, I've got a problem. I need you to take care of it. But to tell you the truth, I really want to run the rest of my life. God says, if you want me to work on the problem, you've got to give me every area of your life, and give it all to me, not just part. When we do, it produces incredible power to change.

So, why don't more people do it? The truth is, they're afraid. They're afraid that by submitting their lives to Christ it will turn them into something they don't want to be. They're afraid it means no fun, no freedom, and becoming some distorted view of a fanatic for Christ. That's one of the biggest lies that has ever escaped from hell. Did you hear that? That's a lie straight from the flames of hell. Jesus said, "I've come so that you can have life and have it to the full." What God is saying is, "Don't you know I was your architect? Don't you know that I was your chief construction engineer? Don't you know that I know the way you work? Don't you know that I know you need fun? Don't you know that I know you need freedom? Therefore, in the short term and the long term, you submit your life to me, and I'll give you more joy than you can ever find anywhere else."

You think about the epitome of Christian people that you know and look at their lives and tell me they are not joy filled. If

I get a picture of somebody in my life that is dour and sour and down on anything, he does not rank at my list of top ten Christian people, because he is not, he has missed it somewhere. Jesus said, "I've come so that you can have life, and have it to the full. Make God sovereign in my life.

5) Distance myself from temptation.

If you don't want to get stung by the bees, stay away from them. Avoid situations where you know your temptation is going to be looking you in the eye. The Bible says, "Resist the devil and he'll flee from you." This is not only biblical, it's just good old common sense.

That means if you've got a problem with drinking, don't stock a bar in your house. If I've got a problem with lust, I don't need to go to places that sell pornography. If I've got a problem with overeating, I don't need to line the shelves with junk food. Stay away from the things that cause me problems.

Now can I confess something to you here? I've got weaknesses. I have things in my life that have controlled me and that I still wrestle with daily to keep from controlling me. One of them is food, but my real Achilles heel is ice cream.

Eleven years ago, my wife and I were building a house. While we were building a house, we moved into a little apartment complex on Murfreesboro Road. Across the street in the shopping center was a Baskin Robbins. About 8:00 every night, two hours after our evening meal there was this little churning in my stomach. I'd say, "I believe I'm going to go across the street." It started out slow, one dip. In a couple of weeks, it was two scoops. Within a month, I said, "give me pint and don't put on the lid, just stick a spoon in there." In eight months, I gained 30 pounds. But thank God, I broke that addiction. I'd like to tell you that I applied all these spiritual principles. I didn't, we moved. Baskin Robbins just went "out of sight and out of mind." The key to overcoming temptation is planning in advance not to be around it.

Can I give our teenagers a little word of advice? About a year ago, a year ago this month, a lot of our teens went through a great program called, "True Love Waits," where you made a commitment to stay sexually pure until marriage. I hope you're still on track with that commitment, but if you're going to fulfill that commitment, here's a great piece of advice. You don't wait till you're in the back seat of a car, or you're sitting alone on a couch at your date's house alone, to then ask yourself the question: Do I want to stay pure? If you wait to that point, it's going to be too late. You plan in advance; you decide to avoid the temptation in advance.

Teen, if you want to live your life the way God wants you to live it, you plan your dates. My youth ministers told me a long time ago, "You either go by your plans, or your glands." Let me tell you, you want to go by your plans. Don't you give the devil an opportunity to make you fall! One fellow quit smoking, and somebody asked him, "How did you quit smoking?" I love his answer, he said, "I wet my matches." That's good. Every time he tried to get it out and strike one, he couldn't get that match to strike. He planned in advance.

"Do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:27) It's like climbing a mountain, you get a foothold that allows him to step up and get another foothold, then another and another. Don't let the devil be the king of your mountain. You start by not letting him get a foothold. That may mean you have to choose new friends, get a new job or move somewhere else. The Bible says, "Flee from temptation." You don't toy with it or flirt with it, you run from it. If we're honest, when we flee from temptation, most of us leave a forwarding address. Sometimes we say, "I'll be right down the road, come see me, down there." We want to play with it. Playing with the temptation will not work - you must distance yourself from it.

6) Opt for something better.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7) The battle for your life is fought in your mind. Whatever captures my attention, captures me.

My thoughts control my emotions, my emotions control my decisions, and my decisions control my actions, right? The beginning point of the end product, our actions, starts with our thinking. If you have an addiction, a sin that is mastering your life and you are pretending you could break, you can't break it because it's got you by the throat, I will assure you that you dwell on it every day mentally. In fact, you may be dwelling on it every single hour.

The real key to resisting temptation is not in resisting but refocusing. Do you understand? The real key to resisting temptation is not in the resisting, it's the refocusing. You can't just look at that temptation that's got you by the throat and say, "No, no, no, I don't want it, I don't want it, I don't want it," when every ounce of your flesh desires it. You do want it. That won't work. If you just try to resist, you'll lose. However, you must refocus your attention, you mentally change channels so that when temptation calls, you drop the phone. You don't try to argue by saying "I don't want that; I don't want that" because it is a lie. That's why it's a temptation. The only way you'll have victory over temptation is to refocus your attention on something else, whatever you concentrate on gets you.

That's why so many people fail on a diet. What do you think about while you're on a diet? Food! You say, "Fifteen more minutes and I can have another celery stick." You sit there and look at that clock." Resistance will not work, you must refocus.

I took my mother to the doctor the other day. She's had to go on insulin because of diabetes. But we were in the office talking with the doctor. I was hungry when I went in, but over on the side on the table, he had a big old gunky yellow model of a five-pound blob of fat. I saw it and kept staring and I lost that hunger real fast. Why did I lose my desire for something to eat? It was by refocusing.

Paul says in Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable---if anything is excellent or praiseworthy---think about such things." Do you realize that's called the principle of replacement? You replace the bad with the good, because nature will not allow a vacuum. When you say that your gas tank is empty, it's not empty, it's full of air. You fill it back up, it's full of gas and the air is gone. When you think "I'm going to get rid of this thought", it will come right back if it's not replaced by something better. That's the principle of replacement. It's the principle of a positive affection. Opt for something better.

Don't sit around all day saying, "No, I don't want to be drunk. No, I don't want to give in to sexual desire. No, I don't want to use all my money gambling. No, I don't want to keep smoking." Whatever the problem, that's the wrong way to fight it. The Bible says, you fill your mind with positive things. That's part of knowing the truth, and letting the truth set you free. Opt for something better.

7) Make solid relationships.

Every human being needs a support group. You may not want to call it that, but you sure need it, and so do I. Every person needs a circle of caring people to give him reinforcement and support. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 4:9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" That's truer spiritually than it is physically. January 1st people make resolutions to become a new person. "I'm going to break all my bad habits," and then what? Two months later we are right back into the same old thing. There's a cycle.

We are not what we want to be, and so we humble ourselves. We say, "God, I need your help. I'm failing." The Bible says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He'll lift you up." So, we humble ourselves, God gives us the power to do better. We start doing better and after a few weeks or a couple of months, we start getting proud about how good we're doing. Beware! "Pride goes before a fall." We go right back down. We get down in the depths and we begin to humble ourselves again, and the cycle goes over and over.

How do you break that cycle? You need friends. You need Christian friends who will pray for you, who will care for you, who will encourage you, who will help make you accountable and keep you on track. Two are better than one, because they pick each other up.

I'll give you a parallel verse to this, so important. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16) Did you understand? Now tell me the truth, do you like that verse? "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you..." Do you like that verse? Oh, be honest, you don't like that verse much. I think it's the least obeyed verse in the Bible. We don't want to confess our sins to each other. Nobody does. I don't want to open up. Now it says, "so that we may be healed." We like that part. We want to be healed.

We want the power to break the addiction grip on my life. That comes only by confessing my sin, not only to God, but to each other. That doesn't necessarily mean in front of all the brethren and giving a generic statement. I think in the context that James wrote it, it meant more to a select few Christian brothers and sisters, who know me, who love me, who trust me, and whom I trust implicitly and who I know will talk to me every day and say, "how are you doing? I prayed for you today."

Now many of you are thinking right now, I have this addiction that is mastering me. I want to break it, but I don't want anybody to know about my problems. I don't give you any hope of ever coming to a lasting solution. I don't give you any hope at all. Because that's the attitude, I can do it on my own, I don't need God. I'll take it all by myself. That attitude will keep you in bondage.

It is essential that we learn to live transparently before God and before the people in our lives who love us the most. Just say, "I have strengths, and I have weaknesses. This is me." The Church, Christian people not the church building, is designed by God to be transparent so we can encourage one another and pray for one another. It is the number one reason God designed a church in the first place. That's why you need to be in some kind of small group. It may be a care group, a Bible study group, just a group of friends who live around you or Christian friends you've developed over years. But you need close, intimate friends where you can sit down sometime with tears in your eyes and say, "I'm burned out, I'm about as depressed as I can get." Or where you can look them in the eye and say to maybe others your age, "I'm having trouble parenting. I've got a child that I don't know what to do with, and I'm at the end of my rope." They will probably look at you and say, "I didn't know anybody else was the same way, but I'm that way, too."

You need somebody close enough in your life that you can look in the eye and say, "You know five years ago I went on a business trip, and I started nipping a little bit of booze, and I didn't think anything of it. But now, I drink every day and I hide it in the closet, and I don't want anybody to know that I'm addicted." Until you can get a group of people that you can confide in, you'll stay in your addiction.

To paraphrase James 5:16, revealing your feeling is the first step to healing. Others of you are thinking, well I'm going to quit. I'm just not going to tell anybody. That's a cop-out. That's making provisions for the flesh, Romans 14:13. You're guaranteeing failure by making an escape hatch so that you can bail out and nobody will know you ever failed. Everybody needs a support group.

Summary

Seven steps to freedom, straight from the Word, clear as a bell, no mistaking and no short cutting. 1)

Freedom starts today.

2) Refuse to blame others.

3) Examine your life.

4) Employ Christ's sovereignty.

- 5) Distance yourself from temptation.
- 6) Opt for something better. 7) Make solid relationships.

"The God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:4) When God heals me of my addiction, my life-controlling sin, I receive comfort from him. This is the very same comfort I'll pass on to somebody else. The best people to help somebody overcome a particular addiction, whether it is booze, workaholism, or whatever, are people who've come out of the same thing. Because the comfort they've received from God, God uses them to pass it on. That's what we need to be and do. We want to be more that way.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1198

Questions:

1. God is
 - Love
 - Righteous (just)
 - Truth
 - Merciful
 - Peace
 - All the above

2. All mankind is a slave to whatever has mastered him.
 - True
 - False

3. When is it time to start controlling your life?
 - Tomorrow
 - As soon as time is available
 - Today

4. Who is to blame for your addiction or lack of self-control?
 - Parents
 - Society
 - Someone else
 - Self

5. How does one identify one's addiction or lack of self-control?
 - See a doctor
 - Seek help from a friend
 - Self-examination

6. People are afraid to submit to Christ because they think it means no more fun or freedom.
 - True

False

7. Flirting with a temptation is okay as long as one does not yield to the temptation.

True

False

8. The battle for your life is fought in your mind (heart).

True

False

Answers to Questions

1. All the Above

2. True

3. Today

4. Self

5. Self-examination

6. True

7. False

8. True