

Introduction: Kids, you can make your way back to Transformation Station. Let me also say that it was an awesome week of Soccer Nights! Kids. Parents. Volunteers. Leadership. Great Job! One of our goals as a church is to make a positive difference in our city. One of the questions we try to ask ourselves is this: "If Redemption Hill ceased to exist, would anyone in Medford notice? Would anyone view it as a great loss because of the impact we are having on peoples' lives."

We like to say that we are a church that is "in the city, for the city." The first preposition, "in," is a geographic reality; it is a given, but the second preposition, "for," is a matter of the heart. We could be in the city to use the city and take from the city, but we know that God has called us to be for the city and serve the city.

That is the reason we encourage one another to not simply get involved in events like Soccer Nights and serve efforts like our food and clothing drive for families in need, but also to display Christ in tangible ways wherever we find ourselves. It is also the reason why we try to speak into practical issues that people struggle with right here in Greater Boston. Our Look Up series this month is designed to address topics we all struggle with. We looked at depression last week. We will look at anxiety and fear next week, and today we are going to have a conversation about addiction.

FCF: This is a major issue in our city. A survey released by the Harvard Chan Public School of Health with the The Boston Globe showed that almost 75% of adults in Massachusetts believe heroin use is a very serious problem in our state. As someone who engages with a lot of people in our community, I regularly meet those battling drug use or those who have loved ones under the influence of addiction. More than 1,000 people are believed to have died from opioid overdoses last year, which is a 33% increase over 2012. Many of you know that Medford City Hall hosted an Overcoming Addiction Vigil recently for those who have lost loved ones battling addiction.

Here's some good news: God has something to say to all of us this morning about addiction. He wants us to look up to him to find everything we need.

"Look Up! When you are Struggling with Addiction"
Psalm 16

We are going to turn in the Bible to Psalm 16 this morning. You can find that on page 453 of the Bibles we've provided for you today. Though Psalm 16 was not a Psalm written specifically to deal with the issue of addiction. I believe it carries some potent truth for us to consider as it relates to the topic. Follow along as I read it for us: *Read Psalm 16.*

The Point: The key to overcoming any struggle or addiction is discovering goodness and joy in God.

As we begin: I want you to consider two things:

- 1) Rather than thinking about addiction as something *out there* that other people deal with, we should first consider our own struggles. We should acknowledge we all struggle with faulty desires. We all are tempted. Every one of *us* could be the next addict.
- 2) In his love, God wants to bring us out of that which enslaves us. He wants to set us free from addiction.
 - Early in his ministry, Jesus stood up in the synagogue to read the words of Isaiah 61:1 because they spoke of what he came to do: **"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;" (Isaiah 61:1)**
 - Jesus came to set us free.

T: I am going to imagine that I am sitting across from someone who is battling addiction and we just finished reading through Psalm 16 together. My encouragements from this passage are words I would I want to apply to their situation. I have four pleas I would make to them . . . #1

I. Cry out to God for Help (1-2).

- Addiction is nasty and debilitating. **Ed Welch says: “Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from truth so that even bad consequences don’t bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God.”**
- Similarly, David Powlison says: “To addict is to bind, devote, or attach yourself as a servant, disciple or adherent of something.”
- Drug Abuse, Alcohol abuse. Sex & Pornography Addiction. Gambling. Shopping & Compulsive Spending; Or what about some more respectable addictions like . . .
 - Food & Caffeine
 - TV, Internet, Gaming, Cell Phone
 - Sports, even Exercise
- Paul says in 1 Cor. 6:12. **“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated [or enslaved] by anything” (1 Cor. 6:12)**
- Do you believe God can free you or the one you love out of addiction? Is this in his wheelhouse or out of his league?!
- One of the most difficult steps for someone struggling with addiction is crying out for help. Addiction wants us to stay in the dark, isolated from others and even God. But we have to seek the one who can help us out of life’s desperate circumstances.
- This is a Psalm of trust, and trust is an aspect of faith. Faith in God is not simply intellectual belief. It turning to and resting in all of who he is to be sufficient for us in every circumstance.
- In these first two verses, we see David exercise trust. He first says: “Preserve me.” “Watch over me.”
- God is our refuge. When our lives are shaken and unstable, he is the one who keeps us safe and protects us.
- But then look at verse 2: “I say to the Lord, ‘You are *my Lord*; I have no good apart from you.”
 - “You are good and do good.” (Psalm 119:68)
 - Any earthly good finds its source in him. We truly have no good apart from him . . .
 - God is *the summum bonum*, “the highest good.” All other goods find their good in him.
- When you think about it, this is a radical statement of humility. We don’t have it in ourselves.
 - Everyone who is struggling in life, and especially with some form of addiction, must admit our weakness and confess: “We have no good apart from God.”
 - It takes humility to acknowledge our wrong and acknowledge our need for help.

T: That is the first step. The second

II. Please Recognize the Sorrows of Empty Pursuits (4-6).

- Verse 4 speaks of idolatry. Rather than worshiping God, there are those who “run after another god.” And what is the result? Their sorrows multiply. The pain multiplies. The shame and suffering continues to pile up.
- Ed Welch says: “Addictions are ultimately a worship disorder.” This is true of all of our sin. Though we are made to worship God and find our ultimate pleasure and satisfaction in him, we reject his love and turn to other loves and other pleasures.
- Idols are always deceptive in how they work & always destructive in their effect.

Think about **The Progressive Nature of Addiction**

- Ed Welch describes . . . **The Early Cycle of Addictions: Rebellion**
 1. **The heart desires just one more.**
 2. **The body is briefly satisfied.**
- Then the **The Later Stages of Addictions: Bondage**
 1. **The idolatrous heart wants more.**
 2. **Physical desires are unsatisfied and demand more.**
- He then speaks of this progression of thoughts in the decent toward addiction:
 1. **“I don’t like the way I feel.”** (Oftentimes, our craving for an experience or substance begins with a simple moment of discontentment.)
 2. **“I want to manage my world my way.”** (Though we know there is a better path, which is God’s path for us, we choose to follow our own selfish desires. We actually play the role of God.)
 3. **“I like this. This is what I have been looking for.”** (Sin is subtle and deceptive. Satan’s eyes light up when he sees us indulge the first time because he knows the first bite will often lead to the second. These addictions look so alluring, so enticing, but we must realize in every case: Sin over promises and under delivers.)
 4. **“I want to keep doing this!”** (These sinful pleasures offer temporary fulfillment, but only for a short time. That is why we go back again and again.)
 5. **“This means so much to me. I love it.”** (And it does not take long for our sinful practices to begin to hold a powerful sway on our lives.)
 6. **“I want more. I NEED more.”** (Addicts often have a false sense of reality. They believe they are in control, that they can stop when they want, but it’s not that simple. As sin multiples over time and we indulge in it more and more, the desires get stronger and our dependence on that experience gets stronger. Romans 1 tells us we suppress God’s truth when it interferes with what we want, and perhaps in a shocking way to us, we begin to say . . .)
 7. **“You are my god.”** (These addictions serve as “Functional Saviors.” If you take this away from me, you’ll take my comfort, my security, my joy, my peace. The end is voluntary slavery and it leaves us in a miserable state)
 8. **“This hurts. I’ve been betrayed. I want it, but don’t want it.”**
 - It results in increasing sorrow!
 - This should make us feel desperate for God and his solution.
- In Contrast to this nasty picture of the decent of sin into addiction, these verses also show us what a life of worship looks like.
- David knows the vanity of idolatry. “I will no pour out their drink offerings or even take their name on my lips.” No recognition. Not an ounce of devotion. Not flirting with it, which is where a lot of addictions begin.
- David declares that God is his portion. God is the one we need. He is the one who provides for us abundantly if only we will open our hands to receive! *Verse 6*: “The lines, [the boundary lines for our dwelling] have fallen . . .” -
- In Christ, we have it all (maybe a verse/list, not Eph 1)

T: Here’s my third plea:

III. Seek stability through Community & Wise Counsel (3, 7-8)

- If you are going to make it out of addiction, you need a battle plan. God prescribes what we need in his word.
 - Yes, there may be times when there is need for medication to detox off of a particular substance, but I am suggesting that the wisest path to recovery is God’s path to recovery.
 - Though this is not exhaustive, this Psalm begins to show us a path to freedom.

Find Excellent Community (3)

- We all face temptation. We all struggle with sin, and we all need to help one another fight against that which tries to enslave us.
- I hope people in Medford know this is a safe place for anyone to bring their struggles, because we are simply imperfect people who have experienced the grace of God.
- There are seasons in an addict's life where the best thing is to flee from a set of friends that are a source of temptation. "Bad company ruins good morals." (1 Cor 14:33)
- We need to surround ourselves with people who will support us and even call us out if they suspect we are returning to addictive behavior.
- Here are some pointers for helping catch addiction early so that we might intervene.
 - Work: "Have their work habits changed? Late to work? Extended lunch hours? Bring home less \$"
 - Relationships: "Do they have a new set of friends? Are they more secretive? Alone more?"
 - Spiritual life: "Any obvious changes in their devotion to God? Or how they live their life for God"
 - What about their weight? Sleeping patterns? Physical Appearance?
- Surround yourself with people who will care for you, BUT also realize that it must not be one-directional.
- Here's a radical *and*, I believe, true statement that I want you to consider: *Every action we make will effect someone else.*
 - This is inescapable. No action is morally neutral and there are consequences to all of our actions.
 - Allow your love for other people to motivate self-control and following through on your battle plan.

T: Finding excellent community is a huge part of the equation, but vv. 7-8 tell us the greatest piece of the solution.

Set God Before You in Everything (7-8)

- *Verses 7-8 go together.*
 - Wise counsel enables us to live wisely. God gives us direction from his Word. Even the statement "my heart instructs me" is a reference to a heart being full of God's truth.
 - Who are you opening yourself up to for godly counsel? Do you need a Christlike friend to offer you counsel? A pastoral counselor? professional counselor? We need people who will help us set God before us.

Our entire lives are to be lived *CORAM DEO*, before the face of God. This is our greatest defense.

- **Win the Battle of your Mind by setting the Lord before you.**
 - We get deceived in our minds. We begin to think that temptation is going to bring lasting satisfaction, or that there will not be consequences to our actions.
 - That is why we must "... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5)
- **Win the Battle of your Desires by setting the Lord before you.** Keep turning to Christ . . .
 - It is wise to setup boundaries, if you are an alcoholic, remove yourself from temptation. If you are struggle with pornography, setup filtering software. If you are addicted to your phone, put it away for set hours of the day.
 - Do this through the Word & Prayer & Daily, not just Sunday, Worship Daily.
 - To conquer our sinful desires, we must replaced them with greater desires.
 - We have to replace those things we once esteemed precious and valuable with that which is truly precious and valuable.
 - This is what the Scottish preacher **Thomas Chalmers** referred to as the expulsive power of a new affection. When we talk about our affections we mean our desires, love, emotions, and

things like that. He said, **“There is not one personal transformation in which the heart is left without an object of ultimate beauty and joy. The heart’s desire for one particular object can be conquered, but its desire to have some object is unconquerable. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one.”**

- This happens one thought and one decision at a time. And here’s the really amazing part: as we say yes to Christ one decision at a time, we will become addicted to him. We will see how good he is and desire more and more and more of him.

T: Addiction does not have the last word. Relapse is not inevitable. God has given us everything we need. (2 Pet 1:3) The Gospel is the cure. *Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Finally, here’s my final plea . .

IV. Settle for nothing less than joy & life (9-11)

- Verse 9. “Therefore . . .” What he says in vv. 9-11 is predicated on God being his refuge, his good, his portion, his counselor and delight.
- What is the consequence of treasuring God above all false idols?
 - “Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices.”
 - As we set God before us and forsake the worthless idols in our lives, God gives us his gladness and joy.
 - JOY is not designed to be an elusive possession for the Christian. Joy is not icing on the cake. Joy is what God wants us to experience daily.
 - God’s joy does not come and go with our shifting circumstances. We can possess joy in the midst of great celebration or joy in the midst of great suffering.
 - This is what God wants for us. Jesus said in John 10:10 . . .
- LIFE - *Read vv. 10-11*
 - God wants us to experience LIFE in this life. - “My flesh also dwells secure.”
 - AND God wants us to experience LIFE in the next life. - There is life after life.
 - “You will not let your Holy One see corruption.” David knows his relationship with God will not end with earthly death.
 - His is confident he will dwell with God where there is joy and eternal pleasure in his presence.
 - That is what makes heaven, heaven. And that is what makes life worth living today!
 - Jesus earliest followers said these verses pointed to him. Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 13 both quote Psalm 16 to tell us that David was pointing us to Christ. Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross to bear our sin and shame, even the sin and shame of our addiction, but he rose from the dead on third day after he was crucified to show that God gives life beyond death.
- The resurrection of Christ should fill us with immense hope, not only for the future but also for the present. If our God can overcome death, how could we conclude that he does not hold the power to bring us through our greatest sin and suffering.

Conclusion:

- I want to invite you to hope today. I want to invite you to joy today. No matter where you are in your struggle with sin and addiction. Jesus offers you life.
- Our God is the God who lifts us up from the ashes and makes the ruins come to life.
- Let’s seek him together today.