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FREEDOM FROM THE SLAVERY OF ADDICTIONS,FOCUS ON GAMBLING

The life and death struggle to be free – Last month I pointed out that the Bible describes man's fallen condition in this world as one of slavery: *a slave of sin* (John 8:34), *a slave to lusts and pleasures* (Titus 3:3), *a slave to whatever controls you* (2 Peter 2:19), *a slave to the devil* (2 Tim. 2:26). The Bible declares that Jesus Christ came to deliver man from slavery: *If you remain faithful to my teachings, you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.* (John 8:31) *Now you are free from your slavery to sin...*(Ro. 6:17)

Last month I compared several examples of slavery: (1) The slavery of the children of Israel in Egypt, (2) The practice of slavery in Colonial America, (3) The slavery of sin and addictions. I also pointed out that slaves cannot free themselves, they need a "deliverer": (1) Moses, (2) Lincoln, (3) Christ.

GETTING FREE IS A LIFE AND DEATH ISSUE,

AND IT IS A LONG-TERM STRUGGLE

- The Jews in Egypt were being worked to death in mines, fields, and massive building projects. They were beaten, half-starved, and their boy babies were being exterminated on orders of Pharaoh. Pharaoh resisted releasing them even when his people were punished by God with ten plagues, and after he finally released them he sent his chariots after them. The Jews were tested by the burning desert by day and by freezing cold at night; by serpents, scorpions, lack of water and food, and by enemy nations that attacked them. Their main problem was their own lack of faith and trust in the mighty God who was leading them to freedom.
- The black slaves in Colonial America were likewise beaten, raped, starved, and worked to death in the cotton fields of America. When a slave escaped he was tracked by a squad of pursuers who had papers, endorsed by the courts and legislature, giving them the right to reclaim the ex-slave even if he had lived as a freeman in the northern states for many years. Freedom for the slave population involved: the Emancipation Proclamation by Lincoln; a massive Civil War in which more than 620 thousand people died; ongoing resistance in the South; the KKK movement; the Civil Rights battles of the 1960's and 1970's; etc.
- Compare the struggle for freedom of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and the black slaves in America with the struggle of people trapped by addictions.

THE DEMONIC ADDICTION OF GAMBLING

My daughter, Jeannine, is fighting and winning her battle with a gambling addiction, so she has been buying many books on this subject, and as we have been reading them we have been amazed by what we have learned. As I share some of this information, please continually consider:

- (1) Addiction is a spiritual battle; i.e., it is an attack on the soul directed by the devil and his demons. I understand that this whole subject is ordinarily described in sociological, psychological, and biological norms, and while there are certainly valid and helpful insights in these perspectives, I believe that the revelation and insights of the Bible are normative for Christians. I believe that Biblical revelation is more real than what we usually call reality. It is "truth."
- (2) Note that the huge enterprise of gambling is a coordinated attack by "the world, the flesh, and the devil."
- (3) Again, continually compare the addiction of gambling and the victims' struggle to get free with the struggle of the slaves in Egypt and the slaves in early America.
- (4) Remember that all slaves are victims. This does not mean that they bear no responsibility, it simply recognizes that they

are slaves and cannot free themselves without a “deliverer.”

The following accounts and information are from Addiction by Design by Natasha Dow Schull:

MOLLIE’S STORY

“Mollie’s play began soon after she moved to Las Vegas with her third husband in the 1980’s when he taught her to play video poker. Occasional visits to casinos turned into sessions of hours and then days, to a point where she was spending entire paychecks over two-day binges at machines. She even cashed in her life insurance. “In the beginning there was excitement about winning, but today when I win I just put it back in the machines. People don’t understand that *I’m not playing to win, I’m playing to play, to stay in that machine zone where nothing else matters.*”

Sharon, another compulsive gambler, agrees with Mollie. Sharon said she experienced the “human world” as capricious and insecure, but that when she was on a slot machine she was in a “zone of security, like being in the eye of a storm.”

(My daughter, Jeannine, identified completely with Mollie and Sharon and the multitude of others who were quoted in this book. She said she did not play to win but to escape from her fears, anxieties, guilt, condemnation, and hopelessness. She understood about the “zone.”) Mollie reflected: “Is it about money? No. Is it about enjoyment? No. Is it about being trapped? Yes. It is about having lost the plot as to why you are there in the first place.”

To put the zone into words, the gamblers I spoke with used the terminology of hypnosis and magnetism. “You’re in a trance, on autopilot. It’s like a magnet, it pulls you in and holds you there.”

The Slot Machine

Today’s standard machines are complex devices assembled on a digital platform out of 1,200 individual parts, built by up to 300 people, including script writers, graphic artists, marketers, mathematicians, and mechanical, video, and software engineers. Until the mid-1980’s games such as blackjack and craps dominated casino floors, but by 2003 over 85 percent of industry profits came from machines. Recession stricken states sought new ways to garner revenue without raising taxes. The redefinition of gambling as “gaming” helped to sway its public endorsement as mainstream consumer entertainment. The rise of the personal computer and video games has also facilitated the cultural normalization of machine gambling. The devices are now permitted in 41 states as of 2012 (up from 31 in 2000) and are under consideration by others.

A gambling electronics engineer describes how the machines are set up to deceive: “The strips you see rolling past during the game are ‘teaser’ strips that show lots of jackpots and high-pay symbols while the game runs, then as each reel stops, a different strip circuits in.”

The design, art, lighting, sound of the little bells, sound of jackpots, and background music have been repeatedly tested to determine the most attractive and least distracting elements. One casino found that slot revenue rose by a full 45 percent where machines had been subtly treated with a certain pleasing odor.

Randy Adams, an innovative game designer, is called a master of manipulation. He is constantly updating the technology of the games to ensnare today’s video generation. (Watch out, fathers and mothers!) Another game designer, Nicholas Koenig, implied that slot machines’ hidden mathematical programming was critical to the task of hooking players’ attention, so that “You keep pulling money out of them until you have it all.”

The Casino

Psychologists, sociologists, and behaviorists have been employed by the industry for some 40 years to construct casinos like an elaborate spider’s web. Design has been studied to facilitate the interior state of the machine zone: lack of clocks, no outside windows, ceiling height, carpet pattern, lighting intensity, aisle width, acoustics, temperature regulation, hidden outside doors, monotonous color tones, maze-like aisles, insulated enclaves of machines sheltered in nooks and crannies. (A maze is defined by the dictionary as “an intricate, usually confusing network of interconnecting pathways, as in a labyrinth; its purpose is to confuse or confound.”)

Degree of intensity is not the only aspect of lighting that matters, degree of angle is also critical. Research in casinos has shown that light drains gamblers energy fastest when it hits their foreheads. Music that is too varied can disrupt gambling activity, for it “restores your cognitive state to where you can make rational decisions.” (Note!)

Tracking and Encouraging the Players

Bally's tracks individual payers by incorporating biometric recognition into slot machines via miniature cameras linked to a central database. When a player activates the machine the camera captures the player's image and stores it along with their game play, creating a "John Doe" file, in order to determine the customer's worth and notify floor managers that this is a player worth cultivating. A gambler "overdue" for a visit gets a mailer, followed by a telephone call. They also receive rewards and bonuses. During play at a machine, when the software senses that a player is approaching the threshold of her pain point, it dispatches a live "Luck Ambassador" to dispense rewards such as meal coupons, tickets to shows, or gambling vouchers. The whole purpose is to keep gamblers on course to continue play. Harrah's employs a handheld device connected with cameras on each slot machine, devised by a Stanford professor, that appraises the expression on each gambler's face to determine if he or she is getting discouraged and might need an encouraging visit.

Casinos have created special credit cards and handy ATM machines, and they have encouraged players to exceed their credit limits in various ways. They have also made it possible for players to directly access their checking accounts from the machines, transferring up to \$1,000 per day in the form of play credits.

Las Vegas

The industry not only relies on residents for its workforce but increasingly for revenue. A full two-thirds of those who reside in metropolitan Las Vegas gamble. Of these, two-thirds gamble heavily or moderately.

I interviewed a young buffet waitress living in a trailer park in the northeast part of the city, and an older male businessman living in a gated community in the affluent suburb of Summerlin. The waitress spent whole paychecks at a time, worrying afterward that her children would not have enough money for school lunches. The businessman maxed out credit cards and depleted family savings, while trying to avoid late charges and conceal his losses from his wife.

The Entrapment

The American Psychiatric Association describes "disordered gambling" as associated with job loss, debt, bankruptcy, divorce, poor health, incarceration, and the highest rate of suicide attempts (20 percent) among all addictions. From 30 percent to a staggering 60 percent of all gambling revenue derives from "disordered or problem" gambling.

Other sociologists and gambling addiction researchers have said: Modern video gambling is the most virulent strain of gambling in the history of man, it is electronic morphine and the crack cocaine of gambling. Video machine gambling, with which it is possible to complete a game every three or four seconds, manipulates the brain and can behave like psychostimulants, like cocaine or amphetamines. Experienced video poker gamblers can play an astonishing 900 to 1,200 hands an hour. "The machine is like a fast-working tranquilizer," said Randall. "Playing, it takes two minutes to disappear, to forget, to not feel. It's a wonderful way to alter my reality – an immediate mood shifter." Nancy, a nurse, recounted how she felt sudden cramps one day, but as she began to play she was overcome with a numbness that remained until her last quarter ran out, and when she felt severe pain she looked down and saw that she was hemorrhaging.

Josie said, "In my life before gambling, money was almost like a God, I had to have it. But with the gambling, money had no value, it was just this thing – just get me in the zone, that's all. There's no value to anything, even your own life, except the zone, the zone is your God."

The Government is a Player

It has become commonplace in public discussions to hear that purveyors of commercial gambling, along with the governments that draw taxes from them, have themselves become "addicted" to gambling revenue. "We're drunk on gambling revenue," agreed a representative from Delaware. A senator from South Dakota said, "The biggest addict turns out to be the state government that becomes dependent on gambling revenue." Frank Quinn, an analyst, said: "They are looking for a quick fix to long-term problems. They suspend their own sense of reality." Others have said about government, "They blame others, belittle contrary viewpoints, rationalize their actions, disavow responsibility for negative outcomes, prefer to avoid conflict, refuse to tolerate straight talk, honesty, or directness."

The Desperate Addicts

(A final look at some of the victims of this addiction and what I believe to be the demonic component of their problem):

Diane, a tall, red-headed cocktail waitress in her forties, said she understood her addiction as a kind of destiny that she carried within herself. "Even before I discovered the machines, I had it in me, but they are the most satisfying thing to my addiction that I've ever encountered, and they let that thing inside me grow and take over." Diane then told about a tragic family history that included the death of three brothers and the suicide of her father, grandfather, several uncles, and her cousin, who was the mother of five children and had a gambling addiction.

Robert Hunter described a former patient who prepared in advance for the abandonment of her bodily being that accompanied her fugues into machines: “She was a charming 75-year-old woman whose average gambling time was 72 hours; she used to wear double-layered dark woolen pants so she could urinate a couple of times without anybody noticing since she was unable to leave her machine.”

A retired fire-fighter with diabetes named Pete recalled a day when he felt his blood sugar level drop while at play, but was unable to cash out and stop playing; he stayed three more hours until his credit was depleted, by which point he was slipping into a diabetic coma.

The effects of machine play on gamblers’ bodies are sometimes more cumulative than dramatic. We are talking about challenging the limits of the human body when we’re talking about video gambling addicts.”

Other Addictions

I have focused on gambling, but there are innumerable other addictions. Galatians 5:1 says, *Don’t be entangled again in a yoke of bondage*. This warning was written to a church, to Christians. As I have discovered in over 40 years of the inner healing and deliverance ministry, there are a huge number of Christians who are not free, even as I was not free although I was a Christian and a pastor. Next month I will share some of the causes and cures for addictions that I have learned about.

WHY WOULD GOD WANT A MAN LIKE ME?

Just before I left Loveland, Colorado, and Doris and I moved to Grand Junction, I had an experience that for some reason just came to my mind. One afternoon I was driving home from downtown Loveland and passed a storage unit business. One of the units was open and a sign out front said, “Garage Sale.” I never pass up a garage sale, so I stopped and went inside. An older gentleman was inside, sitting in a lawn chair. He had white hair and mustache, and he introduced himself as Pete Strafachi and told me about his Italian family. As we talked he told me that he was 80 years old and felt he was nearing the end of his life and needed to get rid of the accumulation of stuff he had in the rental unit.

When he mentioned that he was nearing the end, I saw that as an opening to ask him, in as gentle a way as possible, if he knew where he was going to spend eternity, and if he had met Jesus as his Savior.

He said, “I’m glad you asked me that question, because there is something I want to ask you.” Then he told me that he had a habit of sitting on his porch at his home, and that there was an older lady who lived around the corner who had started coming by and talking to him about God and inviting him to go to church with her. He said she belonged to the Church of the Nazarene, which he had never heard of. After several weeks, he said to her, “Lady, I have lived a very rough life. I don’t know anything about church or about God. Why are you asking somebody like me to come to your church?” The lady said it didn’t matter what kind of life he had lived, that she wanted him to come to her church.

He didn’t make any promises to her, but that night he came to his storage unit and sat in the dark and started thinking about his life. He said he asked himself the question, “Why am I still alive? Why am I still in good health after all the things I’ve lived through?” He said that in a moment something strange happened and light started filling his storage unit. He said it got brighter and brighter until it hurt his eyes. Then he heard a voice that said, “Pete, I’ve been waiting for you.”

All of this had happened just the week before I met Mr. Strafachi. He said, “Last Sunday I went with that lady to her church and went to the altar. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do, but I just told God that whatever it was He wanted from me He could have it, and then I got baptized. Then on Sunday night I went to a two-hour Bible study. And since then I’ve felt, I can’t describe it, peace.”

Then Mr. Strafachi said, “Now, you are a Christian and you have told me you are a pastor, so I have a question for you. I have never been a good man. I’ve been married several times. I’ve done some bad things, and I spent many years around gambling casinos. This is my question, ‘Why would God want a man like me?’”

CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

- *Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.* (Luke 2:1) His decree required Joseph and Mary to return to Joseph’s ancestral town to register, so Jesus “just happened” to be born in Bethlehem. 700 years before, the Prophet Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the tiny village where King David had been born. (Micah 5:2) Bethlehem means “house of bread” in Hebrew. Jesus said, *I am the true bread that came*

down from heaven....to give my flesh for the world. (John 6) When we observe the Sacrament of Communion, we symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood.

- Jesus was born around 6-4 BC, before Herod the Great died in 4 BC. (See Matt. 2:1-19)
- The couple found lodging in a stable, probably a cave where the livestock were kept, *because there was no room for them in the inn*, and Mary laid him in a manger (a manger is both the place where animals are fed and the trough that the feed is placed in). A manger was a stone feeding trough, and photos of mangers from that era look like a small version of the tomb in which Jesus was finally laid. The Bread from heaven lay in a feeding trough, with an implicit invitation: "Come, my sheep, and feed on Me."
- Isaiah also prophesied about the coming Messiah seven centuries before he was born. He wrote: *For to us a child is born, unto us a Son (not born) is given.* (Is. 9:6) He continued: *And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
- *And shepherds were guarding their flocks by night.* (Luke 2:8) They were watching over the sheep that would soon be provided for sacrifice in front of the temple. *And suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and said, 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.'* The angel was announcing that the sacrifices in the temple were coming to an end, *for the Lamb of God that had been prepared from the foundation of the world* even now laid in a manger in the village below.
- Three wise men came from afar, drew near to the babe, and laid at his feet gold, for his deity; frankincense, for a lifeod that would be a fragrant offering to God; and myrrh, which was a forecast of his death. The holy family would soon be warned to flee to Egypt from evil King Herod, and these expensive gifts may have paid for their sojourn in Egypt. *Out of Egypt I have called my Son.* (Matthew 2:15, quoting the prophet Hosea, Hosea 11:1)

Come, come to the precious one born in a stable. Gaze in awe upon this precious gift from heaven. Feed upon him until your soul is satisfied. Lay your gifts, and your life, at his feet in adoration.

*Merry Christmas
and may God bless you this year*

Glenn

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