

Resolve to Quit Smoking, a Ten-Step Process

You like smoking. It's your habit, but you know it's an addiction because you can't walk away from it. Smoking controls you. You also love Jesus, but you're not sure how to connect the Gospel to your smoking habit. Where do you begin? How do you kick the habit?

Praise God

The first thing you want to do is praise God that He is moving your heart to kick the habit. Whenever a person wants to change, it is a reason to praise God because it's evidence of His favor on your life. The addicted Christian does not have to despair. People without the Gospel despair. Christians have the answer to the problems of life.

As you are praising God, you want to address the idolatry in your heart practically. Idolatry is vandalism of the heart that marginalizes the Gospel. You don't want to vandalize your heart. Therefore, your goal is to elevate the Gospel to the most prominent place in your life.

connecting the Gospel to her smoking addiction. What did she mean? How do you do that? The term "preaching the Gospel to yourself" is not a Christianized version of self-talk. The idea of preaching the Gospel to yourself is bringing your thoughts to the obedience of Christ.

We destroy arguments, and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ. - 2 Corinthians 10:5

Preaching the Gospel to yourself is an intentional focus on Christ, rather than thinking about yourself or your temptations. The Gospel is Christ, thus, preaching the Gospel to yourself means the same thing as preaching Christ to yourself.

As you preach Christ to yourself, you instruct yourself explicitly and

theologically about what Christ did to take all of your sins and give you His righteousness.

The Gospel is not magic or formulaic. Neither is it like waving a wand over your soul. It is active and intentional obedience to God. It is the opposite of addiction, which is obedience to yourself.

The Power of the Gospel

Do you believe there is power in the Gospel (Romans 1:16)? Do you understand the power of the Gospel that regenerated you can also sanctify you? Do not move too quickly here. Think about it. I am not talking about a cliché or Christian-speak.

There are times when you experience acute temptation that is real and dominating. Your Gospel must be more than nominalism. I'm talking about "Gospel-grunt-work" that empowers you in proportion to your cooperation with the Lord through the process of change.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. - Philippians 2:12-13

You cannot live a non-Gospel-centered life and expect there to be Gospel-centered power to get over the humps of acute temptation. That is a presumption (Psalms 19:13). It is what people do when the plane is going down; they reach out to God in the moment of crisis.

All fallen people are in crisis every second of the day, which is why you want to activate the power of the Gospel every second of your life.

What Is Wrong?

The biggest problem you have is in your heart, not your behavior. What's

between your fingers is behavioral, but you will find the cure somewhere else. This sinful desire of your heart is the same as any behavioral addiction.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. - James 1:14-15

Smoking, eating too many Happy Meals, excessive shopping, or TV binge-watching have one thing in common: the original cause came from the heart. Because smoking has bad optics, people tend to focus on the appearance of smoking rather than the cause of smoking.

Christians are susceptible to condemning the smoker, which is ironic since we all have a similar kind of worldliness in our hearts. The only difference is that our heart idolatries manifest in socially acceptable ways.

An example of this is the overweight person. The smoker is sabotaging his lungs while the overeater is sabotaging his heart. There should not be a lot of debate between smokey lungs and clogged arteries. If the choices are between smoking or eating too much, I think I would rather light up than be overweight, though neither choice is right.

What is wrong with the smoker is his motive for smoking. His habit gives him something he wants. If he wants to change, he must discern and disarm this desire. Not addressing the heart motive is why modifying the behavior has a low success rate. Rose said it this way,

Since that first day, I realized Christ freed me from a false god. What was I thinking? I would get stressed, bored, anxious, etc. and bow to my idol (smoke a cigarette) and then feel okay as if I accomplished something. No, the only true life-sustaining accomplishment is Christ's work on the cross! She had to remove her wrong motives first. If she did not eliminate those causes, when stress, being bored, or anxiousness returned, she would light

up.

Let's say she quit smoking but did not repent of the ruling motives of her heart. The smoking behavior does stop, but she is still an idolator. And because she is an idolator, she will find another way to comfort her troubled soul when difficulty comes.

Perhaps she gains weight in response to stopping smoking. She did not change at the fundamental core of her being. The idolater is still worshipping something other than the Lord. What did she do? She switched idols from smoking to overeating.

Repent from the Right Thing

If you believe smoking is a sin, you need to repent of it, which means getting to the real issue if you want to change. You need to dig deeper. You have to identify, isolate, and repent of the right things, the things that led to smoking cigarettes.

If you get the heart idolatry piece right, there will be proper motivation, hope, encouragement, excitement, and eventual freedom.

Here are a few examples of possible heart motivations of the addicted person. Perhaps some of these things are triggers for you. Maybe you can add other things to your list. You'll notice these things are not exclusive to the addicted smoker.

Self-reliance	Fear	Unbelief	Discontentment	Comfort
Anger	Criticalness	Envy	Unforgiveness	Laziness
Unhappiness	Jealously	Bitterness	Self-Righteous	Ignorance

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All of these conditions in the heart represent reasons for smoking (or whatever your addiction maybe). Any addicted person will find some of these things hanging out in their heart. Smoking masks these underlying things.

My appeal to you is to critically assess yourself to see what idols are lurking in your heart. It would help to have an open dialogue with someone who knows you. Overcoming an addiction alone is hard.

Motivate With Kindness

Condemnation is the worst thing you can do for an addicted person. Self-righteous attitudes toward fallen people are ludicrous. Everybody is addicted to something. Being shocked when someone fails is a misunderstanding of the human condition.

If you want to help him, encourage him. Paul said the kindness of God leads to change. It was God's kind favor to you that resulted in your repentance. If you want to help an addicted person change, show God's kindness to him. Model the Gospel by encouraging him.

You can also show kindness by praying with him. Not just for him, but with him. Another way to demonstrate compassion is by your patience (1 Thessalonians 5:14). More than likely the addicted person will fail, and you will be disappointed. Paul said to keep an eye on yourself as you help the caught person (Galatians 6:2). Give him a shoulder to cry on and an ear that listens.

- ***Do not condemn.***
- ***Do not be surprised.***
- ***Encourage your friend.***

- **Show God's kindness.**
- **Pray for and with him.**
- **Be patient with him.**
- **Be slow to speak and quick to listen.**

These are some of the ways the Lord modeled the Gospel to you. He is kind. He encourages. He intercedes. He also sympathizes and listens when you speak. One of the best gifts you can give the addicted is your imitation of Christ.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. - Ephesians 5:1

It Takes a Community

Sin festers and grows in a dark and silent world. To overcome the ever-present pull to be drawn into it, you must walk in the light while talking about the light. One of the ways you can do this is by letting others know what God is doing in your life. It takes a community.

There are three good reasons to let others know about your struggle and your need for their help:

- **It will extend the net of care and accountability. The more who know what you are doing, the more people there are to serve you by talking directly to you.**
- **The more you talk about what God is doing for you, the more motivated you will be to keep on moving in the right direction, which will assure your ability to learn, remember, and apply what God is teaching you.**
- **The more you share what God is doing, the more others around you will be encouraged to change and grow. God's grace becomes contagious as it spills over into other people's lives.**

You need to tell your friends what is going on and what you are doing about

it. These friends must not be people-pleasers. They must be grace-empowered, God-honoring, neighbor-loving, truth-tellers. Real friends should be compassionately critical during this season of your life.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

- Proverbs 27:6

Change of Plans

Talk to your friends about all the ways people and situations have been sources of temptation for you to smoke. Get specific here. Examine your life. What are those trigger points? Let others know about them, and ask them to bring them up to you when you meet.

- ***When are you most tempted to smoke?***
- ***Who are the people in your life who make it easy for you to smoke?***

Some of these tempters maybe your friends. Others may be secondary associations who are difficult, painful, or frustrating people, but when you're around them, you are tempted to smoke. Fun friends and disappointing friends serve a similar purpose in your life: they tempt you to smoke.

There may also be locations that tempt you to smoke. You need to think about places and events that have been sources of temptation. Consider rearranging calendars, friends, venues, travel routes, and any other thing that may be a source of temptation.

Repentance means to "go the other way." This "turnaround" could be broad in its sweep, and it may cause hurt feelings. Change is often painful, but the growth that accompanies repentance is worth the pain of change.

Love God and Your Neighbor

Sin is doggedly self-focused. It will turn on you with the intent of devouring

you (1 Peter 5:8). Love, on the other hand, is always other-focused. Sin leaves you wanting but love satisfies. Sin eats at you until there is nothing left but a shell, while love fills you to the brim (Psalm 23:5).

You want to replace your bad habit of self-centeredness with the proper habit of other-centeredness. Stop making it all about you. Paul talked about putting off and putting on (Ephesians 4:22-24).

It's time to put off your self-centered lifestyle and put on a God-centered one. Practically serving other people is an excellent, Gospel-centered idea. It is the opposite of what an addicted person does.

It is impossible to quit smoking and not fill your heart or time with other things. God created you to worship from the heart while manifesting that worship to His world. Something will rule your heart and your behaviors.

The Creator created you to worship Him and love others (Matthew 22:36-40). The Gospel is the perfect picture of what that looks like in a fallen world. How can you spread the fame of God by actively serving others in your community? Ask God to give you ideas.

Pray Without Ceasing

Rose said she fell on her knees and cried like a baby. Her example is the best way to describe what your life must resemble. It's a praying life. I cannot overstate this. You will have to live on your knees. And as you pray, enlist others to pray for you.

Bombard the throne of God with relentless petitions for merciful grace. There is grace for the humble, and He loves lavishing His children with much of it (James 4:7).

Here is the good news: If you are thinking about quitting smoking, you have correctly positioned yourself for God's other-worldly favor.

