

## **“My Secret--Addictions”**

Last week we started a series of messages called “My Secret” and today we’re looking at the next installment. The idea behind this series is a statement I’ve heard a number of times: We’re only as sick as our secrets. And I think there’s something to that. But it’s when we get honest with God, with others, that we let light into the darkness, the hiddenness, that we experience freedom. A foundational scripture for this series is Proverbs 28:13. It says, **“Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but those who confess and renounce them find mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, TNIV).** That’s what this series is about. Finding mercy, finding freedom, finding healing in God’s presence.

Last week I mentioned a website called [www.mysecret.tv](http://www.mysecret.tv) created by Lifechurch in Oklahoma City. They created it as a place to make anonymous confessions that would be a step toward confessing to God and beginning a journey of healing. If you’re 18 or older you can use that as a way to find some mercy. And if you go there, go there prayerfully. Pray for the people that have gone there for hope, and you may want to take a first step by confessing, as well.

Now, today we are going to deal with addictions. Let me just say up front that this is some heavy stuff, so let’s kind of just ease into it with a Life question. Be very honest. How many of you say that you are probably addicted to coffee. Just be real honest.

Last Fall some friends took us on a boat trip and they asked me, “Is there anything you have to have?” I was like, “Yeah, coffee!” Two cups every morning. Is that a problem? I honestly can’t imagine starting a day without coffee. Now, because I’m a tightwad I cannot pay four dollars for a fancy cup of it. But I can’t remember the last time I went without a cup. No matter where I’ve been, Japan, Russia, Nicaragua, coffee! I’ve tried to get my wife hooked with me; she says it tastes like dirt. I don’t know if this says something about me, but I actually have a real coffee plant at home.

I like coffee but it doesn’t constitute the kind of addiction we’re getting at today. Today we’re talking about the stuff that gets a hold of your life and doesn’t let go. The stuff that begins to consume everything. And the funny thing about addictions is that nobody ever says to themselves, “Hey, my life is going so great. I mean, things are so good, I think I’m going to screw it up.” Nobody ever says, “You know what? My marriage is going so great, and my kids are so awesome, I think I’m going to become a meth addict so that I can lose my family, and all of my money, and my dignity.” Nobody ever says that, but it happens a lot. No one ever says, “Uh, you know what? I think today I’m going to smoke my first cig, and maybe I’ll get hooked, become a chain smoker, smell bad for the rest of my life, turn my teeth yellow and die at the age of 51 from lung cancer.” No one ever does that, and yet it happens all of the time. No one ever says, “I think I’m going to become an alcoholic so that when my children grow up, they can go to counseling and talk about how much they hated me.” No one ever plans for that, and yet it happens all the time.

Let me read a few confessions that deal with addictions. This first person says, “Food owns me. It controls me. I think about it constantly. I have binges for weeks at a time where I balloon up to grossly obese and then basically fast for a time to drop back to just plain obese. Why can’t I control it?”

This person said, “I’m addicted to the internet, literally. The moment I get home, I turn on the computer. Whenever I’m home, I must have it on. I stay up late, wake up early just to be on the computer. I will avoid leaving the home just to be on the computer. I will avoid my family and friends to play on the computer. I even break down crying if my computer messes up.”

This person said, "I started drinking to numb painful events growing up and it has followed me into adulthood. I am a medical professional and I should know better. I'm dying a slow death by the bottle. Even though I am only in my thirties, drinking affects my marriage, my work, and my finances. Yet, I cannot seem to knock the urge to drink. I know now that alcohol is my master and I so desperately want God to be it. Alcohol is a daily struggle."

This last one offers hope. This lady wrote, "For almost two years of my life, I was addicted to crystal meth. Not only did it tear me apart, but my whole family as well. I got my husband addicted, and after that, our top priority was where we would get our next fix. Not the house payment, not the next car payment, not the utilities or even the kids. We ended up losing everything, which was the best thing that could have happened to us. We both have been clean for over three years. Coming to [church] has made us realize that God loves us no matter how bad we mess up. Thank You, God, so much for Your forgiveness and love."

Addiction is a cruel master, a master of death. It starts with just enough pleasure to hook you, and once you're hooked the cruelty of this master is relentless.

Before we go deeper I want to acknowledge a few things. **First**, I am not an expert on addiction. I'm a pastor and I share what I know, what I've learned, from that perspective. **Second**, I recognize that today some of you are battling addictions and some are not. If you are, listen carefully today because there's hope. If you're not battling an addiction, don't tune this out because someone you know is in that battle right now. That's a fact. And if you're a Christ-follower, knowing about addiction can equip you to help, to do something, to help someone be free.

The **third** thing I want to acknowledge is the complexity of addiction. There's actually some debate about this. Is addiction a result of sin? Does it have to do with spiritual warfare and temptation and choosing to give in to that? Or is addiction a disease that if we have a predisposition for and exposure to we're in trouble? Is addiction a spiritual issue or a practical issue? From what I've read and encountered, it's a combination. And we have to be careful about understanding it that way. The 12 steps of AA clearly point to the need for God to help bring freedom. But they also clearly point to personal responsibility and choices.

Trying to battle an addiction without God is nearly impossible. Trying to battle addiction without a structured program is nearly impossible. Both are needed. In other words, I don't think it is possible to just pray your way out of an addiction, you need a program. But a program by itself can't do it. A program that doesn't address the spiritual side of addiction won't lead to a successful recovery either.

The **fourth** thing I want to say is that no matter what you might be struggling with, you are welcome here. This is not a place of judgment, this is a place of hope, a place of acceptance. Nobody here will look down on anyone else because they struggle with an addiction because all of us, ALL of us, struggle with something.

Now, the Bible doesn't talk about addiction directly other than Paul telling the older women to not be addicted to much wine (Titus 2:3). But the Bible does speak about temptation, about sin, about choices. It talks about protecting yourself with spiritual armor, it talks about not giving the devil a foothold. The Bible doesn't say much about addiction but it talks clearly about choosing who your master will be. Jesus said, "**No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other**" (Matthew 6:24, NIV).

Now, the Greek word that is translated as master means this, it means to rule. It means to have dominion over. It very literally means to be the lord of. You will have a master, but you get to

choose. Your master can be one of life, or one of death. Jesus is the Lord of life. Addiction is the cruel master of death.

Question for you, “Has something mastered you?” Could be smoking. Could be smoking weed. Tobacco. Could be dipping. It could be drugs—legal or illegal. Could be alcohol, gambling, the internet, television, video games. Could be food. Could be over-spending, could be steroids.

Now, if you will notice, I didn’t mention sexual addictions because next week we’re are going to look at sexual secrets. **But how do you know if something has you mastered.** Let’s look at six questions and see how you respond. First question: **Do your family and friends say that you have a problem?** Are people telling you that something is hurting you or your relationships? Number 2: **Do you continue even though you are hurting people?** Number 3: **Do you arrange your schedule around “it”?** Whatever it is. Number 4: **Without it are you restless, irritable?** Number 5: **Is it leading you to isolation?** Number 6: **Are you trying to keep it a secret?** If you answer yes, to three or more you are likely mastered. If you are, if someone you know is, there is hope.

To help us understand this a little bit better I’ve asked Teddy Steen to join me up here for a conversation about this. Come on up Teddy. Teddy is a part of the Saint Paul’s community. She’s a recovering addict and has been clean and sober for 22 years now. She works at Cable One, but her life calling is to help addicts and alcoholics be free. She bought property and opened up ASCENT Recovery Residences here in Joplin to help men get healthy and get whole.

1. So Teddy tell us about your addiction?
2. How did you get started?
3. What was life like as an addict/alcoholic?
4. Why did you seek recovery?
5. How did God play into your recovery?
6. Is addiction related to sin or disease?
7. How do choice and personal responsibility interact?
8. What would you say, particularly to young people, as they face temptations of drugs and alcohol, gambling, gaming, anything that could become addictive?
9. If people are here today and they’re in the battle, what do they need to know?
10. Where can they find help?

Jesus said, **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV)** He’s talking about Satan. Satan wants to steal, kill, and destroy and addictions are one of his great weapons.

I’ll say it one more time: You will have a master in your life, will that be a master that steals, kills and destroys you; or the master who offers life? **Here are some pieces of advice to choose the master of life.** The first one is this: **Can the excuses.** No more excuses. In Luke 14 Jesus told a story about a guy that was preparing a great banquet and invited all these people to come to the banquet, but scripture says, **“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'” (Luke 14:18-20, NIV).**

Understand this. God is inviting you to experience freedom, and if you make an excuse, you are excusing yourself from God’s best. What’s your excuse? “Well, you know, I tried and I can’t quit. I really don’t have a problem. I mean, you may say I do. I can quit any time that I want to.” Oh, yeah? Why haven’t you? Can the excuses. “Well, people aren’t going to understand.” Can the

excuses. “Well, I did everything I could. I just can’t overcome it.” Not by yourself you can’t. But look at this, Philippians 4:13, “**I can do everything through him who gives me strength**” (Philippians 4:13, NIV). Can the excuses.

Number two, **Cut the ties**. Paul wrote this is scripture: “**Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’**” (1 Corinthians 15:33, NIV). If there is something or someone that corrupts you, that leads you to the addiction, to the cruel master, to the false lord, cut it. Cut the ties. If that’s a person who is your source, your supplier, or your tempter; that person is no longer your friend. Period. Not again. No contact. No texting. No emails. No hanging out. That person is no longer your friend until months or years down the road, you’re strong enough to help pull them out. Today you can’t. Cut the ties with those people.

And cut the ties with the stuff. You got a pornography stash? It’s in the garbage today! If the garbage man doesn’t come until Wednesday, you are burning it today. Cut the ties. If you are a smoker and you want to be free, your cigarettes go in the garbage before you leave the building today. Cut the ties. What are those for you today?

You can the excuses. You cut the ties. And number three, **You fill the void**. You fill the void with something besides your false lord, the cruel master. Fill the void spiritually and fill it practically. The spiritual side is the stuff we talk about around here all the time. Do those things that help you to love God—worship, read the Bible, pray. Love others—get in a small group, a support group, a life group—build those relationships. Serve the world—get over yourself, go beyond yourself and serve others near and far. Fill the void spiritually.

And fill the void practically. This is where it is important to get in a program--a 12 step program, a recovery residence--and work the program. Fill the void.

I’ve got to wrap up. And this is how I want to do that, with the words of Jesus. If you are someone you know is facing addiction hear the voice of life. Hear the voice of Jesus. His words were not words of shame, or guilt, or ridicule. You want to know what he said, he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). If you know somebody who is fighting the battle tell them those words. If you’re fighting that battle, hear those words. Are you weary with the battle, are burdened with addiction, come to me, I will give you rest. I will give you peace. I will give you life. I’m the master of life. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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