

*"Father, I thank you so much that even when we go through a storm in our lives, you are still the Lord, still sovereign, still in charge. God, and even when we face great temptations, strong temptations, God, in our weakness we are made strong, and we are made strong because of your love that abides in us. God, I pray today that as we open your Word, I pray for that person who just feels temptation that today is going to be the day that they are going to be able to make a move to get past it, to overcome it. For we pray this in your precious name. Amen."*

If you are a guest with us for the first time, I want to welcome you to Christ Fellowship. My name is Rick, and I serve as lead pastor here. We are concluding a series today that we have entitled "Tempted". I want to invite you to open your Bibles. We are going to digress out of Genesis just for today, and I want us to look at Hebrews, chapter twelve, as we wrap up this series called "Tempted". I want to welcome all of our campuses. I love it when we are all together like this, and I love what God is doing in all of our campuses all over Miami Dade County.

I want to set this up by sharing this with you. This past week a group of us from Christ Fellowship made a mission trip to Cuba. Folks, I've got to tell you, it was an amazing experience. For one thing, we met some of the most precious, most humble, most loving people imaginable. What I really, really love is this: There is a small but very powerful movement of God that is just now starting to penetrate that island.

O yeah! There are people there who have found Christ in a personal and intimate way, and what I love is they are beginning to gather, and we got to gather with them. These churches, small as they are, would gather under trees. That is where they meet. Some of them meet in yards. We met in some churches that were literally a shack with no electricity whatsoever. Yet, even though there is no physical electricity in many of these gatherings, there was a spiritual electricity in those meetings. I've got to tell you, they just made the hair stand up on the back of my neck.

Christ Fellowship, I believe that God is calling us, Christ Fellowship, to partner with these people. They are going to need our help, and we are going to partner with them. I met with a group of pastors there, and we sort of laid out a strategy to be able to advance the gospel. I believe God is going to create a spiritual awakening from the east end of that island to the west end of that island. There is going to be a great revival, and God is going to use us to help make that happen. I'm going to be telling you more about that in the weeks and months to come. But, let me hasten to add this. In fact, as I look at that situation there, my mind went back to the words with which we began this series, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King. I want you to listen, one more time to this cry for freedom.

“When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every city, from every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to free up that day when all of God’s children: black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old negro spiritual: “Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

Again, do you feel the passion in his words? Why was it that Dr. King was so moved? And why are some of us still moved today when we hear those words? Why is it that some of you still tear up when you hear that message? It is simple isn’t it? It is because there is something in us; there is something in you and there is something in me, whether we are black or white or Hispanic, or oriental, or Asian, it doesn’t matter, there is something in us that was put in us by God that longs to be set free.

Now Christ Fellowship, with that longing to be set free, let me turn a corner and bring all of that over to this final message called “Tempted”, because nothing has the power to rob us of our freedom, and then steal away our future any more than a sin from which we can’t break free. Nothing has the power to make a slave out of you any more than a sin from which we can’t break free. Nothing has the power to oppress us, nothing has the power to enslave us any more than a sin to which we have become addicted.

Now mind you, if you have never grappled with addiction, if you have never grappled with an addictive sin, God bless you. You may look at people and say, “Why doesn’t she just quit doing that?” “Why doesn’t he just stop doing that?” Even Christians can be crass in their rhetoric like that. Let me tell you, once you have been gripped by an addictive sin, let me tell you, it is easier said than done. But here’s the good news, and this is my proposition today.

When it comes to addictive sins, as powerful as they are, God longs to set us free. In fact, Jesus said, *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”* So, God longs for some of you, when it comes to addictive sin, God longs for some of you to be able to rise up and say, and this is my prayer, that you will be able to rise up and say, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I’m free at last. Now, you might be saying, “Rick, you don’t know my addictive sin. You don’t know what a grip it has got on my life. How in the world can I get untangled from this thing that has such on me?” Well folks, we are going to find out today as we wind up this final message, not by going back to the book of Genesis, but by looking at Hebrews 12. So, if you have your Bibles, open them to Hebrews 12, and I want to give you three thoughts about addictive sin.

Number one: Addictive sins are powerful. We often underestimate the power of addiction. With that in mind, listen to Hebrews 12:1. The Bible says, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders."* In other words, as a believer you and I are in a journey with Christ, and we want to get rid of anything that is going to hinder us in this journey. Here is what can hinder us. Here is what can slow us down. Look at the balance of the verse: It is *"the sin (not a sin) that so easily (what?) entangles you."* Stop, because there is the description of an addictive sin. There is the description of a habitual sin. It is a sin that entangles us in a bondage.

By the way, the word "entangle" there is a translation of a Greek word that is used of tying somebody up so that they are in bondage; so they can't move; so they have lost their freedom to move about. Folks, make no mistake about it, that is exactly what addictive sin can do to us. Addiction is a type of bondage, slavery if you will. I've been saying through this whole series that many of us spend our lives circling the same sin. I might say, spend our lives chained to the same sin, day after day, week after week, month after month, and for some of you, year after year. You think to yourself: "I have prayed about this addiction. I have cried out to God to set me free from this thing. Then you think, "I've broken free from it", only to allow yourself to get chained to it again. You start to think to yourself: "What is wrong with my stupid self that I can't free from this sin? What is wrong with me? Listen, before you beat yourself up too much, you need to know this: You are not alone in your struggle.

In fact, I want you to listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans, chapter seven. These are words coming from a godly man, one of the most godly men who ever lived, and yet, Paul is talking about a sin that he is having to struggle to get free from. Listen to what he says in Romans 7:15: He says, *"I do not understand what I do."* Stop there, because that is the lament of somebody who has a habitual sin going on; who is addicted. Addicted people often cry out, "I don't get it. I don't understand me. What is wrong with me." That is what Paul is saying. He says, "I don't understand what I am doing." Paul said, *"For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do."* Have you ever felt that way? I think we all have at some point in our life. In other words, there is this ever repeating sin that you hate, but you keep on doing it. Here is the tension you feel if you are a believer. Listen to Romans 7:18: *"For I have the desire to do what is good, (if you have a desire to do what is good, that is a good sign. That is a sign of life. That means you truly are a believer, and God put that desire in you to do good.) Paul says, "For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."* He says, "I want to do good. I want to avoid evil, but I keep doing it. In fact, this is what he says in verse

19: *"For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing."*

Get it: To keep on doing what is evil when you hate doing what is evil shows you the power of addictive sin. To keep on doing what is evil when you in your heart hate doing what is evil, but you keep on doing it, shows you the power of addicted sin. By the way, let me tell you how you can tell if you are addicted. Here is how you can know if you are addicted. When the sin calls, you come. That is how you know. When the sin calls you, you go to it. That is how powerful addiction is. Whether it is pornography, whether it is drugs, whether it is cigarettes, whether it is alcohol, whether it is weed, whether it is gambling, whether it is spending more money than you have, I'm just telling you, these are addictive sins. We underestimate their power. They are very, very powerful, and they can steal our future. They can steal our families. They can steal our freedom.

Folks, I'm telling you, I know this because I have witnessed the power of addiction first hand. You say, "What do you mean? I mean, I grew up with a father who was addicted to alcohol. But I've got to tell you, when I was a child, even though my dad would be mean to me when he was drunk, even in spite of that, I loved him but I felt so sorry for my father, because he did not want to be an alcoholic. Who does? He didn't want to be chained to this sin. He did not want to lose his family, but he did. He did not want to lose his future. He did not want to lose his freedom, but that was what was going on. In fact, I remember one of those moments you never forget. I'll never forget waking up one morning when I was about nine years old. I was the first one awake and I found Dad on the couch with a pistol in his mouth. In his desperation he took the gun out of his mouth and pointed it at me. I think he thought about killing me and then killing himself. But as he pulled the gun down, he started pulling his hair like he was trying to pull his hair out. He started screaming, "I hate myself. I hate myself." That is the power of addictive sin.

In fact, listen to what Paul says in Romans 7:24: *"What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body?"* This is the lament of people chained to addictive sin. Here is the great news. Christ wants to set you free. He will set you free. But here is what you need to know. Addiction resistance demands a resistance strategy. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, listen to verse 4. *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet (what?) resisted."* The word "resist" is a translation of the Greek word *histome*. *Histome* means to fight back against something that is attacking you. Folks, have no illusions about it. Habitual sins, addictive sins are a very powerful attack, and it an

attack against your future, against your faith, against your family, and against your freedom, and it has to be resisted. You've got to fight back.

By the way, you recall that we said, when it comes to resisting temptation, when it comes to resisting addictive sin, it is not just about trying harder, it is about training smarter. Let me put it to you another way. It is not about fighting harder. It is about fighting smarter. So, in our study in Hebrews, it's like we have been in fighting camp, and we have been learning how to fight, not harder, but to fight tactically, to fight strategically, so that we can resist, so we can fight back against temptation and overpower it. We basically gave you, in your fight, sort of a three part defense against temptation, against addiction. I want to give you a quick review of this. So, here it is. What is your first move when a temptation strikes? Your first move is: Stop! What do I mean by that? When temptation strikes, when the addiction presents itself, your first move is: Stop! Whatever it is, you put your addiction right there. Your first move is to stop, step back from it and create separation between you and it. To create margin for yourself, between you and that sin so that you can make your next strategic move which is: Think!

What did we give you to think? We gave you four pre-meditated thoughts; three of the four default thoughts that you are going to think every time you are confronted with a temptation. Here they are: Every God given command is for my good. Meaning what? When Satan tempts you, he wants you to disobey a command of God. Every command that God gives is for my good. None of them is arbitrary. None of God's command are just random commands. Every one of them is designed to protect your future, to protect your family, to protect your faith, and to protect your freedom. Your second thought is, every temptation is designed to steal my future, my faith, my family and my freedom. When you look at that temptation you need to realize that there is more at stake at that moment than you realize at that moment: Your future, your faith, your family, your freedom are on the line. You need to default to that thought.

Your third default thought is: "I cannot see the real enemy here." In other words, when you look at your temptation, if your temptation is a drug; if your temptation is alcohol; if your temptation is pornography; you need to look at that temptation and go, "I don't see the real enemy here", the real enemy in back of this is Satan and his demons. We taught you that they exist in a dimension that we cannot see, but they are hell bent on destroying your future, your faith, your family, and your freedom. So you need to default to "there is more in play than I see in the physical dimension.

The fourth default thought: Every temptation is first and foremost is an attack against my God. In other words, you need to understand that the attack is not against you.

Satan is just trying to use you. He doesn't care about you. He is trying to get at God through you. Here is how that works. Remember, we said that when you face a temptation, you are forced to make a choice. God says this, and Satan says this. God says, "Adam and Eve, here is a command. Don't eat of that fruit." They say, "Why can't we eat it." God: "Because it will kill you. I want to protect your freedom. I want to protect your future. Believe me, it will kill you. You will die." That was the word of God. In verse four Satan says, "You won't die. He won't kill you."

So, every temptation you face, you have to make a choice. "Who do I believe? Who is telling me the truth? Who do I trust?" Listen, when you go with the temptation, basically what you are saying is: "God, I think I will go with Satan on this one. God, I hear what you are saying, but I think I will have more fun if I go with Satan." What that does is it grieves the heart of God. It grieves His Spirit. It breaks His heart, which is exactly what Satan was going after in the first place. He wants to go after your relationship with God, your trust. Satan wants to destroy that trust. So I hope that when you think that you say, "I'm not just going to surrender to this. I'm not going to let Satan destroy my relationship with God. I'm not going to let Satan use me to grieve God's Spirit. I'm going to fight back."

What is your next default move? Talk! This is not just a sermon folks. I want you to walk out of here equipped, trained, to be able to get yourself free. So, your next move is talk, and who do you talk to? You talk to God. You talk to Jesus. Why? Because, as you focus on Him, as you focus your eyes on Him, that has a way of reinforcing your resolve. Addiction not only demands a strategy, it demands resolve. Meaning what? Meaning a strategy without resolve, a strategy without a mind that is made up, is just words on a piece of paper. You just have a plan on a piece of paper, if you don't have the resolve to pull it off. Let me tell you: the reason why you are still struggling with this sin, this habit, is not because you don't know the plan. It may be, if you are still struggling, is that you don't have the resolve. Listen to what he says in Hebrews 12:4. He says:

*"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of (what?) shedding your blood."* Meaning what? Meaning, in your fight against temptation, you are not fighting as if your life depends on it. You are not fighting like a physical fight to where you are going to get bloodied over this thing. Folks, what he is trying to tell us is that temptation is fighting against you. It is fighting to steal your future, your family, your faith, and your freedom. And if you don't make up your mind to fight back, you are going to lose. You are going to lose every time. You have got to fight back. This is the resistance against sin. By the way, the word "resist" here, in your struggle to resist sin,

is from that Greek word *histome*, and *histome* is the word we get histomenes from. Histomenes are actually a part of your bodies immune system. You know what your immune system is. Your immune system is that part of your body that defends your body. It is that part of you that fights back when you are attacked by a disease. It fights back, and when your immune system is strong, it fights back against temptation with great power, with great effectiveness. Transverse: when your immune system is weak, it doesn't fight back at all. It just succumbs to the disease. By the way, that is what Aids is. Aids is a deficient, or a weakened, immune system. So what happens? The disease just kills a person. It just takes over. What an image of addictive sins attacking you. Now folks, what I want you to get is this: Your mind is your immune system against sin. It is your immune system against addiction. It is your immune system against addictive sin. Make no mistake about it: the battle against addiction is either won or lost right up here in your mind. Let me tell you, if you are losing the battle, it is because you don't have the dissolve to fight back. It is because your immune system is weak. You see, here is what we are fighting, just so you understand. Paul says, "Who will save me from this body." You see, it is your flesh, that is your problem. It is your problem; it is my problem. This stuff is like feed me, give me what I want, let me lust, and sin is calling you, and your flesh is like, "Let's go get it. Let's go to it." Your only defense, your only immune is a mind that is resolved, a mind that is mad up to fight back strategically.

God has two ways to strengthen your resolve if your resolve is weakened. Let me give them to you. The power of focus reinforces our resolve. Listen to what he says in verse two. Talking about habitual sins that entangle us, here is how you strengthen your resolve. "By fixing your eyes on Jesus." Not what, but who. By the way, that phrase "fixing your eyes" is a very beautiful word. Let me spell it out for you in the Greek. I always tell you that the Bible was originally written in Greek, the New Testament, translated to English then to English, French, or whatever. That phrase "fixing your eyes" originally is two Greek words *apa*, the prefix, and *horoo*. You can picture it this way: *apa* in the Greek means to turn away from something; to put distance; to turn away from something. *Horoo* means to stare at something. It means to fix your eyes on something. It means to have tunnel vision about something. So, the idea is this: You look away from one thing: *aha*, you turn away from it, you don't look at that, then you look and fix your eyes on another thing. Folks, this is so powerful. What he is saying is, don't fix your eyes on your sin, on your temptation. That will never get you un-addicted. Fix your eyes on Christ.

I've said before, sometimes we take this temptation, this addiction, and we circle it. We put it in the center of our life. We cry about it, we pray about it, we worry about it, we beat ourselves up about it. It becomes what we focus on. That won't ever fix you. Take that out of the center. Don't look at that, but put your eyes on Christ alone. You say, "Why?" Because as you start staring at His glory, as you look at this passage as it tells you that He has a plan marked off for your life, not for your neighbor, He's got a plan marked off for your life. He's got a plan for your life; it's not the same as mine. He's got a plan for my life, and it's not the same as yours, but there is a path and a plan that is good for you, good for your future, good for your life, good for your family, He has this plan for you. When you realize He has a plan for your life, when you get that into your head, it will have a way of saying, "I'm not going to let this chain me from following that path. By the way, as you gaze at Christ, as you focus on Him, when you allow Him to fill you with His love, when you allow Him to fill you with His compassion for you; when you allow Him to fill you with His mercy for you; as you just fill your soul with that, it has a way of just lifting you above the temptation.

A couple of years ago I did an illustration. I had a balloon, and I blew my own air into the balloon and tied a knot in it. Then I tried to get it to stay up and it kept falling back down. So the only way for me to get it to stay up was to beat it, to keep punching it. Sometimes that is what we do. When we fail we beat ourselves up. "You're so bad. You stop doing that. How can you do what you do?" And you keep beating yourself up. But, if I take that same balloon and I fill it with helium, what happens? I don't have to punch on it anymore. It just stays up on its own. You see, when you fill yourself with Christ's love and you get it in your head that He loves you and has a plan for your life, it has a way of just giving you the resolve to say, "I'm not going to let this keep me from that."

By the way, my father that I told you about that was the alcoholic, lost the family, divorced my mother: When I was seventeen and I got saved, right after I got saved my dad saw the change in my life and he in turn gave his life to Christ, and he left the drink and never went back to it again, because he fell in love with the Savior. He fell in love with Christ, and it changed him. Listen folks, I've talked about that before, about Christ falling in love with him, and I've had some of you come to me and say, "Rick, I love Jesus. I've filled my heart with His love and I still went back to the sin. So, God has a plan B. The power of discipline can reinforce our resolve. Listen to what he says in verse 4: *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."* In other words, you are not traveling like your life depends on this. Your life does depend on this. You've got to fight to be free, to protect your future, your

family, your faith, your freedom. If you don't fight for it; if you don't have the mental resolve, God is basically saying, He will do whatever it takes to get you to have the resolve to get free here

You say, "What do you mean "whatever it takes?" Well, listen to what He says: Hebrews 12:5: *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline."* Meaning what? Meaning if you are a Christian, and you are addicted, and you don't have the resolve to turn this thing loose, God will do whatever it takes to get you to have that resolve. Whatever it takes, is often and sometimes one of the things that He will do to reinforce your resolve is to discipline you. Listen to verse five again: *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's (what?) discipline."* Now, put your thinking caps on, because here is what I want you to get.

You must never confuse discipline with punishment. That is two different things. If you are going to punish someone, your goal is to get even. If you want to punish someone, your goal is to make them pay. Have you ever heard a parent say to their child, "You just wait till we get home?" You say, "Meaning what?" Meaning you are going to pay. That is punishment. Here is the good news. God never deals with us like that. God never says to you, "You are going to pay for that sin." Do you know why? It's because your sins have already been paid for, in full; paid for on the cross. He has no desire to get even with you because He is not mad at you, He is mad about you.

Sometimes people will say to me, "Do you think God is punishing me?" I can tell you for sure, God is not punishing you. He is not making you pay. He is not trying to get even with you. God never punishes His children. But He may be disciplining you. There is a difference. Think about it this way. The word "discipline" has as its root word the word disciple. Do you know what a disciple is? Disciple means a learner. It means somebody who is being trained; somebody that is being taught. So when God disciplines you, when He afflicts you, His goal is not to get even with you. His goal is not to punish you, but his goal is to train you to get loose from that sin before it destroys your life. What God is saying is this: If you don't have the resolve to get rid of that danger. He will do whatever it takes to get you to break free..

Have you ever heard Christians say this: "God will never put more on you than you can bear?" That is not true. In fact, God will put whatever it takes on you to get you to break free from that sin. He will afflict you; He will afflict your body. He will afflict your health; He will afflict your job, He will afflict your finances; He will do whatever it takes for you to let go of that sin, not because He is mad at you, but because He is mad

about you; not because He hates you, but because He loves you. He doesn't want you to be chained. He will afflict you. In fact, listen to Psalm 119:67. I love this verse. It says, "*Before I was afflicted, (In other words God, before you spanked my rear end. God, before you took me to the woodshed, what was I doing?) I went astray, (I was handcuffed to a temptation, but now, after you afflicted me, what am I doing?) 'But now I obey your word.'*"

I was thinking this week when I was getting all of this ready, about my little mom when she would spank me and my brother when we were children. She was pretty much a single mom; raised us by herself. She was less than five feet tall, and I think she had a fourth or fifth grade education. But my mom had made up her mind that she was going to do whatever it took to keep me out of trouble. I remember when Mike, my brother, a year older than I am. There was just the two of us. But whenever we would do wrong, she would make us go cut our own switch. How many of you had to go cut your own switch. God bless you. You can feel for me. But she would tell Mike, if you come back with a little switch, I'll go cut a bigger one and you'll get double the spanking. So, we would be out there in the woods and I would be over there with a little switch, and we would cry and say, "I think this one is okay." My brother would say "No" and he would rip off a big stick because he wasn't going to get double. He wasn't going to take the little one back to mom. But she would afflict my behind with that switch. Do you know why? She was never mad. I never saw my mother angry. She was not mad at me; she was mad about me. She loved me. Some of my friends in the neighborhood where I grew up got in trouble. I had friends in that neighborhood who went to prison, and some are still in prison. They lost their freedom. My little mom, God bless her heart, was basically saying, "I will do whatever it takes; I will afflict your behind, to keep you from losing your life, and your freedom, I will switch you. That is your Father. That is your God. He loves you so much that He does not want you to spend your life in bondage. He wants you to be able to cry out, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last."

By the way, I'm grateful my mom spanked me. I'm probably only here because she afflicted me. We should thank God when He afflicts us. That is a good sign that you are a child of God. When you sin, you get afflicted, that is special attention. That is special love.

Now as a church, Christ Fellowship, we are geared, engineered, structured, to help us when we get chained to a sin. A dear gentleman came to me a couple of months back. We were standing outside, and he had been serving here at the church for awhile. He came over to me and he said, "Rick, I just wanted to know if it is okay if I keep coming

to Christ Fellowship. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm addicted to alcohol." I said, "Friend, not only is it okay for you to keep coming here, we actually built this church to help people like you and like us who get addicted, who get in trouble. We built this church for people like this. We are all welcome: Amen? With our struggle with sin. I want to give you a three part strategy that we have designed to help you when you are struggling with sin, to protect you. Here it is.

Number one: Small Groups. We keep telling you; get in a small group. Why? Because we are better together. We are safer together. If you try to do this Christian life alone, you and your wife, you and your kids, you are vulnerable. Have you ever seen those National Geographic programs where the cheetah is stalking the little Bambi, and the little Bambi is over here alone. The cheetah cuts over from the flock to the one alone and gets him. That is you, if you are without God's people. You were meant to exist in a flock, a herd, not by yourself. Get in a small group. Try it, you will love it. We share life with each other. We pray for each other. Second is what we call CF Recovery. This is amazing. CF Recovery is where we come together. It's like a small group but a little bit bigger group. At CF Recovery we deal with hang-ups and habits. We all have hangups and habits. Finally, we have CF Counseling. This is where we have someone professionally trained to go one to one with you. Sometimes you need somebody to walk with you through getting free, don't you? That is what this is for. We've got counselors that can help you.

Folks, as we close out this series, here is my prayer today. You are going to have that strategy down to a science. You are going to have it ready to go when that temptation strikes. Our resolve is going to be this: "Addiction, you will not steal my future; you will not steal my faith; you will not steal my family, you will not steal my freedom."

*"Father, I thank you so much that even when we go through a storm in our lives, you are still the Lord, still sovereign, still in charge. God, and even when we face great temptations, strong temptations, God, in our weakness we are made strong, and we are made strong because of your love that abides in us. God, I pray today that as we open your Word, I pray for that person who just feels temptation that today is going to be the day that they are going to be able to make a move to get past it, to overcome it. For we pray this in your precious name. Amen."*

If you are a guest with us for the first time, I want to welcome you to Christ Fellowship. My name is Rick, and I serve as lead pastor here. We are concluding a series today that we have entitled "Tempted". I want to invite you to open your Bibles. We are going to digress out of Genesis just for today, and I want us to look at Hebrews, chapter twelve, as we wrap up this series called "Tempted". I want to welcome all of our campuses. I

love it when we are all together like this, and I love what God is doing in all of our campuses all over Miami Dade County.

I want to set this up by sharing this with you. This past week a group of us from Christ Fellowship made a mission trip to Cuba. Folks, I've got to tell you, it was an amazing experience. For one thing, we met some of the most precious, most humble, most loving people imaginable. What I really, really love is this: There is a small but very powerful movement of God that is just now starting to penetrate that island.

O yeah! There are people there who have found Christ in a personal and intimate way, and what I love is they are beginning to gather, and we got to gather with them. These churches, small as they are, would gather under trees. That is where they meet. Some of them meet in yards. We met in some churches that were literally a shack with no electricity whatsoever. Yet, even though there is no physical electricity in many of these gatherings, there was a spiritual electricity in those meetings. I've got to tell you, they just made the hair stand up on the back of my neck.

Christ Fellowship, I believe that God is calling us, Christ Fellowship, to partner with these people. They are going to need our help, and we are going to partner with them. I met with a group of pastors there, and we sort of laid out a strategy to be able to advance the gospel. I believe God is going to create a spiritual awakening from the east end of that island to the west end of that island. There is going to be a great revival, and God is going to use us to help make that happen. I'm going to be telling you more about that in the weeks and months to come. But, let me hasten to add this. In fact, as I look at that situation there, my mind went back to the words with which we began this series, the words of Dr. Martin Luther King. I want you to listen, one more time to this cry for freedom.

"When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every city, from every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to free up that day when all of God's children: black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old negro spiritual: "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

Again, do you feel the passion in his words? Why was it that Dr. King was so moved? And why are some of us still moved today when we hear those words? Why is it that some of you still tear up when you hear that message? It is simple isn't it? It is because there is something in us; there is something in you and there is something in me, whether we are black or white or Hispanic, or oriental, or Asian, it doesn't matter, there is something in us that was put in us by God that longs to be set free.

Now Christ Fellowship, with that longing to be set free, let me turn a corner and bring all of that over to this final message called "Tempted", because nothing has the power to rob us of our freedom, and then steal away our future any more than a sin from which we can't break free. Nothing has the power to make a slave out of you any more than a sin from which we can't break free. Nothing has the power to oppress us, nothing has the power to enslave us any more than a sin to which we have become addicted.

Now mind you, if you have never grappled with addiction, if you have never grappled with an addictive sin, God bless you. You may look at people and say, "Why doesn't she just quit doing that?" "Why doesn't he just stop doing that?" Even Christians can be crass in their rhetoric like that. Let me tell you, once you have been gripped by an addictive sin, let me tell you, it is easier said than done. But here's the good news, and this is my proposition today.

When it comes to addictive sins, as powerful as they are, God longs to set us free. In fact, Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*" So, God longs for some of you, when it comes to addictive sin, God longs for some of you to be able to rise up and say, and this is my prayer, that you will be able to rise up and say, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last. Now, you might be saying, "Rick, you don't know my addictive sin. You don't know what a grip it has got on my life. How in the world can I get untangled from this thing that has such on me?" Well folks, we are going to find out today as we wind up this final message, not by going back to the book of Genesis, but by looking at Hebrews 12. So, if you have your Bibles, open them to Hebrews 12, and I want to give you three thoughts about addictive sin.

Number one: Addictive sins are powerful. We often underestimate the power of addiction. With that in mind, listen to Hebrews 12:1. The Bible says, "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders.*" In other words, as a believer you and I are in a journey with Christ, and we want to get rid of anything that is going to hinder us in this journey. Here is what can hinder us. Here is what can slow us down. Look at the balance of the verse: It is "*the sin (not a sin) that so easily (what?) entangles you.*" Stop, because there is the description of an addictive sin. There is the description of a habitual sin. It is a sin that entangles us in a bondage.

By the way, the word "entangle" there is a translation of a Greek word that is used of tying somebody up so that they are in bondage; so they can't move; so they have lost their freedom to move about. Folks, make no mistake about it, that is exactly what

addictive sin can do to us. Addiction is a type of bondage, slavery if you will. I've been saying through this whole series that many of us spend our lives circling the same sin. I might say, spend our lives chained to the same sin, day after day, week after week, month after month, and for some of you, year after year. You think to yourself: "I have prayed about this addiction. I have cried out to God to set me free from this thing. Then you think, "I've broken free from it", only to allow yourself to get chained to it again. You start to think to yourself: "What is wrong with my stupid self that I can't free from this sin? What is wrong with me? Listen, before you beat yourself up too much, you need to know this: You are not alone in your struggle.

In fact, I want you to listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans, chapter seven. These are words coming from a godly man, one of the most godly men who ever lived, and yet, Paul is talking about a sin that he is having to struggle to get free from. Listen to what he says in Romans 7:15: He says, "*I do not understand what I do.*" Stop there, because that is the lament of somebody who has a habitual sin going on; who is addicted. Addicted people often cry out, "I don't get it. I don't understand me. What is wrong with me." That is what Paul is saying. He says, "I don't understand what I am doing." Paul said, "*For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.*" Have you ever felt that way? I think we all have at some point in our life. In other words, there is this ever repeating sin that you hate, but you keep on doing it. Here is the tension you feel if you are a believer. Listen to Romans 7:18: "*For I have the desire to do what is good,* (if you have a desire to do what is good, that is a good sign. That is a sign of life. That means you truly are a believer, and God put that desire in you to do good.) Paul says, "*For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*" He says, "I want to do good. I want to avoid evil, but I keep doing it. In fact, this is what he says in verse 19: "*For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing.*"

Get it: To keep on doing what is evil when you hate doing what is evil shows you the power of addictive sin. To keep on doing what is evil when you in your heart hate doing what is evil, but you keep on doing it, shows you the power of addicted sin. By the way, let me tell you how you can tell if you are addicted. Here is how you can know if you are addicted. When the sin calls, you come. That is how you know. When the sin calls you, you go to it. That is how powerful addiction is. Whether it is pornography, whether it is drugs, whether it is cigarettes, whether it is alcohol, whether it is weed, whether it is gambling, whether it is spending more money than you have, I'm just telling you, these are addictive sins. We underestimate their power. They are very, very

powerful, and they can steal our future. They can steal our families. They can steal our freedom.

Folks, I'm telling you, I know this because I have witnessed the power of addiction first hand. You say, "What do you mean? I mean, I grew up with a father who was addicted to alcohol. But I've got to tell you, when I was a child, even though my dad would be mean to me when he was drunk, even in spite of that, I loved him but I felt so sorry for my father, because he did not want to be an alcoholic. Who does? He didn't want to be chained to this sin. He did not want to lose his family, but he did. He did not want to lose his future. He did not want to lose his freedom, but that was what was going on. In fact, I remember one of those moments you never forget. I'll never forget waking up one morning when I was about nine years old. I was the first one awake and I found Dad on the couch with a pistol in his mouth. In his desperation he took the gun out of his mouth and pointed it at me. I think he thought about killing me and then killing himself. But as he pulled the gun down, he started pulling his hair like he was trying to pull his hair out. He started screaming, "I hate myself. I hate myself." That is the power of addictive sin.

In fact, listen to what Paul says in Romans 7:24: *"What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body?"* This is the lament of people chained to addictive sin. Here is the great news. Christ wants to set you free. He will set you free. But here is what you need to know. Addiction resistance demands a resistance strategy. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, listen to verse 4. *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet (what?) resisted."* The word "resist" is a translation of the Greek word *histome*. *Histome* means to fight back against something that is attacking you. Folks, have no illusions about it. Habitual sins, addictive sins are a very powerful attack, and it an attack against your future, against your faith, against your family, and against your freedom, and it has to be resisted. You've got to fight back.

By the way, you recall that we said, when it comes to resisting temptation, when it comes to resisting addictive sin, it is not just about trying harder, it is about training smarter. Let me put it to you another way. It is not about fighting harder. It is about fighting smarter. So, in our study in Hebrews, it's like we have been in fighting camp, and we have been learning how to fight, not harder, but to fight tactically, to fight strategically, so that we can resist, so we can fight back against temptation and overpower it. We basically gave you, in your fight, sort of a three part defense against temptation, against addiction. I want to give you a quick review of this. So, here it is. What is your first move when a temptation strikes? Your first move is: Stop! What do I mean by that? When temptation strikes, when the addiction presents itself, your first

move is: Stop! Whatever it is, you put your addiction right there. Your first move is to stop, step back from it and create separation between you and it. To create margin for yourself, between you and that sin so that you can make your next strategic move which is: Think!

What did we give you to think? We gave you four pre-meditated thoughts; three of the four default thoughts that you are going to think every time you are confronted with a temptation. Here they are: Every God given command is for my good. Meaning what? When Satan tempts you, he wants you to disobey a command of God. Every command that God gives is for my good. None of them is arbitrary. None of God's command are just random commands. Every one of them is designed to protect your future, to protect your family, to protect your faith, and to protect your freedom. Your second thought is, every temptation is designed to steal my future, my faith, my family and my freedom. When you look at that temptation you need to realize that there is more at stake at that moment than you realize at that moment: Your future, your faith, your family, your freedom are on the line. You need to default to that thought.

Your third default thought is: "I cannot see the real enemy here." In other words, when you look at your temptation, if your temptation is a drug; if your temptation is alcohol; if your temptation is pornography; you need to look at that temptation and go, "I don't see the real enemy here", the real enemy in back of this is Satan and his demons. We taught you that they exist in a dimension that we cannot see, but they are hell bent on destroying your future, your faith, your family, and your freedom. So you need to default to "there is more in play than I see in the physical dimension.

The fourth default thought: Every temptation is first and foremost is an attack against my God. In other words, you need to understand that the attack is not against you. Satan is just trying to use you. He doesn't care about you. He is trying to get at God through you. Here is how that works. Remember, we said that when you face a temptation, you are forced to make a choice. God says this, and Satan says this. God says, "Adam and Eve, here is a command. Don't eat of that fruit." They say, "Why can't we eat it." God: "Because it will kill you. I want to protect your freedom. I want to protect your future. Believe me, it will kill you. You will die." That was the word of God. In verse four Satan says, "You won't die. He won't kill you."

So, every temptation you face, you have to make a choice. "Who do I believe? Who is telling me the truth? Who do I trust?" Listen, when you go with the temptation, basically what you are saying is: "God, I think I will go with Satan on this one. God, I hear what you are saying, but I think I will have more fun if I go with Satan." What that does is it grieves the heart of God. It grieves His Spirit. It breaks His heart, which is

exactly what Satan was going after in the first place. He wants to go after your relationship with God, your trust. Satan wants to destroy that trust. So I hope that when you think that you say, "I'm not just going to surrender to this. I'm not going to let Satan destroy my relationship with God. I'm not going to let Satan use me to grieve God's Spirit. I'm going to fight back."

What is your next default move? Talk! This is not just a sermon folks. I want you to walk out of here equipped, trained, to be able to get yourself free. So, your next move is talk, and who do you talk to? You talk to God. You talk to Jesus. Why? Because, as you focus on Him, as you focus your eyes on Him, that has a way of reinforcing your resolve. Addiction not only demands a strategy, it demands resolve. Meaning what? Meaning a strategy without resolve, a strategy without a mind that is made up, is just words on a piece of paper. You just have a plan on a piece of paper, if you don't have the resolve to pull it off. Let me tell you: the reason why you are still struggling with this sin, this habit, is not because you don't know the plan. It may be, if you are still struggling, is that you don't have the resolve. Listen to what he says in Hebrews 12:4. He says:

*"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of (what?) shedding your blood."* Meaning what? Meaning, in your fight against temptation, you are not fighting as if your life depends on it. You are not fighting like a physical fight to where you are going to get bloodied over this thing. Folks, what he is trying to tell us is that temptation is fighting against you. It is fighting to steal your future, your family, your faith, and your freedom. And if you don't make up your mind to fight back, you are going to lose. You are going to lose every time. You have got to fight back. This is the resistance against sin. By the way, the word "resist" here, in your struggle to resist sin, is from that Greek word *histome*, and *histome* is the word we get histomenes from. Histomenes are actually a part of your bodies immune system. You know what your immune system is. Your immune system is that part of your body that defends your body. It is that part of you that fights back when you are attacked by a disease. It fights back, and when your immune system is strong, it fights back against temptation with great power, with great effectiveness. Transverse: when your immune system is weak, it doesn't fight back at all. It just succumbs to the disease. By the way, that is what Aids is. Aids is a deficient, or a weakened, immune system. So what happens? The disease just kills a person. It just takes over. What an image of addictive sins attacking you. Now folks, what I want you to get is this: Your mind is your immune system against sin. It is your immune system against addiction. It is your immune system against addictive sin. Make no mistake about it: the battle against addiction is either won or

lost right up here in your mind. Let me tell you, if you are losing the battle, it is because you don't have the dissolve to fight back. It is because your immune system is weak. You see, here is what we are fighting, just so you understand. Paul says, "Who will save me from this body." You see, it is your flesh, that is your problem. It is your problem; it is my problem. This stuff is like feed me, give me what I want, let me lust, and sin is calling you, and your flesh is like, "Let's go get it. Let's go to it." Your only defense, your only immune is a mind that is resolved, a mind that is mad up to fight back strategically.

God has two ways to strengthen your resolve if your resolve is weakened. Let me give them to you. The power of focus reinforces our resolve. Listen to what he says in verse two. Talking about habitual sins that entangle us, here is how you strengthen your resolve. "By fixing your eyes on Jesus." Not what, but who. By the way, that phrase "fixing your eyes" is a very beautiful word. Let me spell it out for you in the Greek. I always tell you that the Bible was originally written in Greek, the New Testament, translated to English then to English, French, or whatever. That phrase "fixing your eyes" originally is two Greek words *apa*, the prefix, and *horoo*. You can picture it this way: *apa* in the Greek means to turn away from something; to put distance; to turn away from something. *Horoo* means to stare at something. It means to fix your eyes on something. It means to have tunnel vision about something. So, the idea is this: You look away from one thing: *aha*, you turn away from it, you don't look at that, then you look and fix your eyes on another thing. Folks, this is so powerful. What he is saying is, don't fix your eyes on your sin, on your temptation. That will never get you un-addicted. Fix your eyes on Christ.

I've said before, sometimes we take this temptation, this addiction, and we circle it. We put it in the center of our life. We cry about, we pray about it, we worry about it, we beat ourselves up about it. It becomes what we focus on. That won't ever fix you. Take that out of the center. Don't look at that, but put your eyes on Christ alone. You say, "Why?" Because as you start staring at His glory, as you look at this passage as it tells you that He has a plan marked off for your life, not for your neighbor, He's got a plan marked off for your life. He's got a plan for your life; it's not the same as mine. He's got a plan for my life, and it's not the same as yours, but there is a path and a plan that is good for you, good for your future, good for your life, good for your family, He has this plan for you. When you realize He has a plan for your life, when you get that into your head, it will have a way of saying, "I'm not going to let this chain me from following that path. By the way, as you gaze at Christ, as you focus on Him, when you allow Him to fill you with His love, when you allow Him to fill you with His compassion for you;

when you allow Him to fill you with His mercy for you; as you just fill your soul with that, it has a way of just lifting you above the temptation.

A couple of years ago I did an illustration. I had a balloon, and I blew my own air into the balloon and tied a knot in it. Then I tried to get it to stay up and it kept falling back down. So the only way for me to get it to stay up was to beat it, to keep punching it. Sometimes that is what we do. When we fail we beat ourselves up. "You're so bad. You stop doing that. How can you do what you do?" And you keep beating yourself up. But, if I take that same balloon and I fill it with helium, what happens? I don't have to punch on it anymore. It just stays up on its own. You see, when you fill yourself with Christ's love and you get it in your head that He loves you and has a plan for your life, it has a way of just giving you the resolve to say, "I'm not going to let this keep me from that."

By the way, my father that I told you about that was the alcoholic, lost the family, divorced my mother: When I was seventeen and I got saved, right after I got saved my dad saw the change in my life and he in turn gave his life to Christ, and he left the drink and never went back to it again, because he fell in love with the Savior. He fell in love with Christ, and it changed him. Listen folks, I've talked about that before, about Christ falling in love with him, and I've had some of you come to me and say, "Rick, I love Jesus. I've filled my heart with His love and I still went back to the sin. So, God has a plan B. The power of discipline can reinforce our resolve. Listen to what he says in verse 4: *"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."* In other words, you are not traveling like your life depends on this. Your life does depend on this. You've got to fight to be free, to protect your future, your family, your faith, your freedom. If you don't fight for it; if you don't have the mental resolve, God is basically saying, He will do whatever it takes to get you to have the resolve to get free here

You say, "What do you mean "whatever it takes?" Well, listen to what He says: Hebrews 12:5: *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline.'" Meaning what? Meaning if you are a Christian, and you are addicted, and you don't have the resolve to turn this thing loose, God will do whatever it takes to get you to have that resolve. Whatever it takes, is often and sometimes one of the things that He will do to reinforce your resolve is to discipline you. Listen to verse five again: *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's (what?) discipline."* Now, put your thinking caps on, because here is what I want you to get.*

You must never confuse discipline with punishment. That is two different things. If you are going to punish someone, your goal is to get even. If you want to punish someone, your goal is to make them pay. Have you ever heard a parent say to their child, "You just wait till we get home?" You say, "Meaning what?" Meaning you are going to pay. That is punishment. Here is the good news. God never deals with us like that. God never says to you, "You are going to pay for that sin." Do you know why? It's because your sins have already been paid for, in full; paid for on the cross. He has no desire to get even with you because He is not mad at you, He is mad about you.

Sometimes people will say to me, "Do you think God is punishing me?" I can tell you for sure, God is not punishing you. He is not making you pay. He is not trying to get even with you. God never punishes His children. But He may be disciplining you. There is a difference. Think about it this way. The word "discipline" has as its root word the word disciple. Do you know what a disciple is? Disciple means a learner. It means somebody who is being trained; somebody that is being taught. So when God disciplines you, when He afflicts you, His goal is not to get even with you. His goal is not to punish you, but his goal is to train you to get loose from that sin before it destroys your life. What God is saying is this: If you don't have the resolve to get rid of that danger. He will do whatever it takes to get you to break free..

Have you ever heard Christians say this: "God will never put more on you than you can bear?" That is not true. In fact, God will put whatever it takes on you to get you to break free from that sin. He will afflict you; He will afflict your body. He will afflict your health; He will afflict your job, He will afflict your finances; He will do whatever it takes for you to let go of that sin, not because He is mad at you, but because He is mad about you; not because He hates you, but because He loves you. He doesn't want you to be chained. He will afflict you. In fact, listen to Psalm 119:67. I love this verse. It says, "*Before I was afflicted, (In other words God, before you spanked my rear end. God, before you took me to the woodshed, what was I doing?) I went astray, (I was handcuffed to a temptation, but now, after you afflicted me, what am I doing?) 'But now I obey your word.'*"

I was thinking this week when I was getting all of this ready, about my little mom when she would spank me and my brother when we were children. She was pretty much a single mom; raised us by herself. She was less than five feet tall, and I think she had a fourth or fifth grade education. But my mom had made up her mind that she was going to do whatever it took to keep me out of trouble. I remember when Mike, my brother, a year older than I am. There was just the two of us. But whenever we would do wrong, she would make us go cut our own switch. How many of you had to go cut

your own switch. God bless you. You can feel for me. But she would tell Mike, if you come back with a little switch, I'll go cut a bigger one and you'll get double the spanking. So, we would be out there in the woods and I would be over there with a little switch, and we would cry and say, "I think this one is okay." My brother would say "No" and he would rip off a big stick because he wasn't going to get double. He wasn't going to take the little one back to mom. But she would afflict my behind with that switch. Do you know why? She was never mad. I never saw my mother angry. She was not mad at me; she was mad about me. She loved me. Some of my friends in the neighborhood where I grew up got in trouble. I had friends in that neighborhood who went to prison, and some are still in prison. They lost their freedom. My little mom, God bless her heart, was basically saying, "I will do whatever it takes; I will afflict your behind, to keep you from losing your life, and your freedom, I will switch you. That is your Father. That is your God. He loves you so much that He does not want you to spend your life in bondage. He wants you to be able to cry out, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last."

By the way, I'm grateful my mom spanked me. I'm probably only here because she afflicted me. We should thank God when He afflicts us. That is a good sign that you are a child of God. When you sin, you get afflicted, that is special attention. That is special love.

Now as a church, Christ Fellowship, we are geared, engineered, structured, to help us when we get chained to a sin. A dear gentleman came to me a couple of months back. We were standing outside, and he had been serving here at the church for awhile. He came over to me and he said, "Rick, I just wanted to know if it is okay if I keep coming to Christ Fellowship. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm addicted to alcohol." I said, "Friend, not only is it okay for you to keep coming here, we actually built this church to help people like you and like us who get addicted, who get in trouble. We built this church for people like this. We are all welcome: Amen? With our struggle with sin. I want to give you a three part strategy that we have designed to help you when you are struggling with sin, to protect you. Here it is.

Number one: Small Groups. We keep telling you; get in a small group. Why? Because we are better together. We are safer together. If you try to do this Christian life alone, you and your wife, you and your kids, you are vulnerable. Have you ever seen those National Geographic programs where the cheetah is stalking the little Bambi, and the little Bambi is over here alone. The cheetah cuts over from the flock to the one alone and gets him. That is you, if you are without God's people. You were meant to exist in a flock, a herd, not by yourself. Get in a small group. Try it, you will love it. We share life

with each other. We pray for each other. Second is what we call CF Recovery. This is amazing. CF Recovery is where we come together. It's like a small group but a little bit bigger group. At CF Recovery we deal with hang-ups and habits. We all have hangups and habits. Finally, we have CF Counseling. This is where we have someone professionally trained to go one to one with you. Sometimes you need somebody to walk with you through getting free, don't you? That is what this is for. We've got counselors that can help you.

Folks, as we close out this series, here is my prayer today. You are going to have that strategy down to a science. You are going to have it ready to go when that temptation strikes. Our resolve is going to be this: "Addiction, you will not steal my future; you will not steal my faith; you will not steal my family, you will not steal my freedom."