

3 Steps to Shake Off the Shackles of Addiction

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Elephants weigh up to 15,000 pounds and stand as high as 13 feet tall. Yet, they can be held captive by a single small rope or chain.

No doubt, fully-grown elephants could easily break their chains. But since they are chained at such a young age, they grow up in captivity thinking there is no use struggling against their chains.

Perhaps you feel helpless, too, as the result of an addiction. Do you turn to alcohol to numb the pain of being sexually abused as a child? Is overeating how you deal with your unmet emotional needs? Does looking at pornography, or going to strip clubs, fill a void in your life?

These things used to comfort you. But now, they control you.

Like an elephant in captivity, you could break free. But your mindset holds you back and prevents you from even trying.

Should you give up? Definitely, no! It's not too late for you to get help.

After all, God is in the business of setting captives free. In fact, Christ began His public ministry by quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah when He said: "He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free," (Luke 4:18).

Christ came to set you free—truly free from the addiction to sin. You can remain chained to your addiction, or you can be released. Here are three steps that you can take to shake off the shackles of addiction.

Step 1: Be authentic.

The first step to letting go of your shackles is to be authentic. Take it from Nathaniel Hawthorne. In *The Scarlet Letter*, he wrote "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true."

How do you know if you are being real? If you stop making any of these excuses:

- "I don't have a problem like so-and-so."
- "I'm in control and can stop whenever I want."
- "One more time won't hurt me."
- "It doesn't affect anyone else."
- "I can deal with this problem on my own."

Let go of any of these lies that you have believed. And confess your sin to God and another believer. A good place to confess your sins is in a 12-step Christ-centered support group.

Healing starts when we begin to confess our sins. James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Who have you told about the deep, dark secrets of your soul? It may be scary to be authentic. However, being real with God and others brings the problem out into the light and allows healing to begin.

Step 2: Let go of past hurts.

The second step to letting go of your shackles is to let go of past hurts. In his book, *Healing is a Choice*, Steve Arterburn explains how to make peace with the past: “Healing is a choice to let go of our past hurts by grieving them, and grieving is a choice to heal the future.”

It’s easy to let feelings of shame, anger, or regret consume you. Instead, address the root issue of your pain.

Ask yourself a few questions:

- “Where does it hurt?”
- “What am I ashamed of?”
- “Who or what is controlling me?”
- “When did I start to turn to my addiction?”
- “Who failed to meet my needs?”

Psalms 34:18 reminds us of how much God cares for our heartache, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” God is the one who brings healing into our lives; yet, we can make choices that encourage healing the broken areas of our hearts.

Write a letter to someone who has hurt you very deeply. Or if you are the offender, write a letter to the person or people that you have hurt. Do not mail the letter, but talk about what happened to a safe person. By taking the time to write your feelings out on paper and to share with a safe person, you are beginning to grieve and let go of any past hurts.

Step 3: Retrain your brain.

The third step to letting go of your shackles is to retrain your brain. Listen to how Martin Luther puts it: “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair!”

But it’s not easy to change the way you think. And let’s be honest: An addiction makes you feel good. It produces chemicals in your brain that make you feel euphoric, peaceful, and loved.

These chemicals change the wiring in your brain so that you think and act differently. As a result, if you have a chemical dependency, you’ll need to get some professional help. But thankfully, there’s still hope for your brain!

God created our brains with the ability to rewire itself—neuroplasticity. Rewiring your brain seems like the plot of a Sci-Fi movie, right? Yet with a little self-examination, it is possible to retrain your brain. And I’ll show you how.

First, take every thought captive. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are encouraged to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” How do you know if your thoughts are obedient to Christ? You can start by keeping a journal.

Second, examine your thoughts through the lens of Scripture. Paul tells us to meditate on things that are: “true, noble, right, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy,” (Phil. 4:8-9). Do your thoughts pass this test? If not, get rid of them!

Third, replace any addiction-driven thoughts with healthy ones. One way to do this is to think about a time in your life when you felt love and peace. Perhaps it could be your wedding day, the birth of a child, a favorite Bible verse, or the time when you trusted in Christ. Another way to change your thoughts is to set some goals for the future. You could plan a mission’s trip, get into shape, memorize Scripture, or start a new hobby.

While you can’t control every thought that comes into your mind, you can choose what you dwell on.

Like a 15,000-pound elephant, are you still being held captive by a single, small chain? If so, change your mindset, because now is the time to shake off your shackles.

To start with, you need to be authentic. Stop denying that you have a problem and making excuses. When you confess your sin to God and another person, you will know that you are on your way to recovery.

Next, let go of past hurts. This means that you will need to address the root issues of why you self-medicate. Remember, Christ knows about your pain. And He will carry you through.

Finally, retrain your brain. Take your thoughts captive, make sure that they line up with Scripture, and replace any unhealthy thoughts with ones that honor Christ.

Your recovery starts with a simple prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son so that I can be set free. I admit that my life is spiraling out-of-control. Help me to find healing for my heartache. And I pray that you will give me the strength to take every thought captive. I ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.