

Breaking Free From Habitual Sin

by Steve Gallagher

This sermon delves into the topic of breaking free from habitual sin by exploring the root causes of sin becoming a lifestyle, the deceitful nature of the human heart inclined towards evil, the importance of true repentance, and the evidence of genuine repentance through transformed lives and fruits of repentance.

Scripture: Jeremiah 17:9, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Matthew 3:8, James 4:8, Genesis 32:24, Luke 11:9, Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Ephesians 4:22

Topics: "Breaking Free from Sin", "True Repentance"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to talk a little bit today about breaking free from habitual sin. Practice anything long enough and it will become a habit, a pattern of life. But how do people become addicted to sin? How does sin become such a habit that it rules their life? It dictates a lifestyle to them.

How does that happen? How could it happen to such nice guys like you and I? Well, because man has a fallen nature, a heart that has a natural inclination toward evil. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, the heart, the human heart is deceitful above all else. It's deceitful, more deceitful than anything in the entire universe.

I don't care what you name or what you describe. There is nothing that has the propensity towards deception as the human heart. And it is true.

Adam Clarke was a man of God that lived about 300 years ago. He was a Bible commentator and a preacher who worked with John Wesley. And he said this, he said, the human heart even hides itself from itself so that its owner does not know it.

A corrupt heart is the worst enemy the fallen creature can have. It is full of evil devices, of deceit, of folly, of abomination. And its owner knows not what is in him till it boils over and is often past remedy when the evil is finally perceived.

And man, that is the truth. Deception, self-deception. That's the worst part of it, is that we not only deceive other people regularly, continually, but we deceive ourselves.

I get saved after, in the midst of years of habitual sin. And when I found that it didn't change, I kind of was wondering, hey, what's going on? Am I really saved? I used to like to do cocaine and smoke crack. And I know that, you know, I've been married for 12 years.

And my wife, through her godliness and through her belief that God would do something in my life to change me and to help me to get rid of my sin, she hung in there with me. And I don't deserve her, but God put us together and somehow we're still together by grace somehow. But I used to do it and I used to come home.

And she knew it. And I'd come home and I'd beg her to forgive me. And I would say, you know, I'll never do it again.

I promise. I really meant it. I would get angry at God for letting me have gotten into sin.

And what sin will do is it distorts your whole perspective of everything. Because I was blaming God for my sin. I was blaming everybody else for my sin except for Drew.

And when I came to that realization that anything in the past is past and I had to be accountable for what I'm doing now, then I had no excuses left. And so I just had to come to the Lord and say, Okay, Lord, I need to restore my relationship and here I am. You know, make me break down that vessel that you call Drew and build me back up the way you want me to be.

And you know what's at the root of any kind of deception? It's pride. There's something in us that is just obsessed with thinking the very best about ourselves. We love to think the best about ourselves, to think of ourselves in the most glowing terms.

That's the way the human being is. And that's why the human heart is deceitful. Because it wants to think the best.

It constantly wants to portray the best image to others and even to ourselves. Because we want to believe the best about ourselves. But that wasn't all that the Lord said.

By the way, you understand, I don't mean to just flippantly throw out the words of God. This is the creator of the human race we're talking about. And he had something to say about the core of man's being.

And the other part to that little sentence that he expressed through Jeremiah. The heart is deceitful above all else, above all things, and is desperately wicked. Who can know it? Desperately wicked.

Imagine it. That we have gone so far since the Garden of Eden, when man was walking in perfection and without sin, in innocence. We have fallen so far from that, that our heart, the core of who we are, is looked upon by God.

And when he sees our heart, what he sees is something that is rotten through and through, evil through and through. Desperately wicked. Jesus came along 4,000 years later, which was 2,000 years ago approximately.

And he didn't help us out much either. He said, That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts.

So much for behaviorism. You know, that's the psychotherapy method where just put people in a good environment, and they'll do the right thing. No, that's not true.

Wrong. It is not true. Because you cannot escape your own heart.

Jesus said, It's what's within us that defiles us. It's what comes out of us. He said that, Out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, and et cetera.

All these things proceed from within and defile the man. Solomon said, He said it in a little more concise terms. This is what he said.

And he was in, walking in the wisdom of God. Solomon had a tremendous gift of wisdom. And he spoke the words of God.

And he said this. He said, The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil. Full of evil.

And insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Now you may not think that you're very insane because you're walking around with a bunch of other lunatics. That's the problem.

We see the other drooling lunatic and we think we look pretty good. But compared to a holy God, we look pretty sad. That's the problem.

One might think, Well, maybe the thing for God to do is just destroy the whole human race and that's what happened one day in Noah's day. Things had gotten so bad. This is what the Lord saw when he looked down on man on this earth.

It says, The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth. Great on the earth. And that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

So God wiped them out. He thought, Maybe if I start with a godly man and a godly family, maybe then we can start this thing all over again and things will get better. Things didn't get better, did they? Things have gotten worse.

In fact, they get worse and worse, it seems like. Some people think that, Well, man is good by nature. He's inherently good and eventually he'll just evolve and get better and better.

No, things have gotten worse and worse. And that's why society is in the trouble it's in today. So what do we do about habitual sin? If we have a heart like this, if the core of our being is in such a mess as this, what do we do? Well, some people feel like the way you deal with habitual sin is to go at it from the emotional standpoint.

And their perspective is, Well, these people have emotional problems and that's why they do things and so on and so on. So they're constantly dealing with things on the emotional level. But dear ones, can I just tell you that of course people have emotional problems who are given over to sin.

Sin corrupts. The more you're given over to sin, the more emotional problems you're going to have. And you can't deal with it from an emotional standpoint.

That's not going to solve the problem. It's like coming up to a well that has a dead carcass on the bottom and the carcass has polluted the water. It's like coming up to that well and skimming the scum off the top and thinking now that you can drink the water.

No. You've got to get down to the heart of the matter, don't you? You've got to get down there and get that carcass out of there. That's what the problem is.

And any time you try to deal with it from an emotional standpoint, you're dealing with it on a superficial level. Yes, there's emotional problems that are attached to sin. But you've got to deal with the sin problem and you've got to deal with the heart.

Other people think, well, you know, support groups. That's what we need to have. We need to have a lot of support groups operating.

That'll help people out of their sin. And support groups can be a help. If you're struggling with a habit, it's good to have other people that you can check in with.

But support groups don't change a man's heart. Support groups, and they even take it a little further, they call it maintaining their sin. Maintenance.

It's the maintenance program. You know, it's kind of like you have this wild, rabid dog, and you keep it on a leash. I'm not going to let this thing out of control, this maniac dog.

I'm just going to kind of keep it under control. Why don't you just take the dang thing out and shoot it for heaven's sakes instead of trying to control it? See, what they're trying to do is keep their life the way they want it to be without making that full surrender. They're trying to patch up the old heart.

But what you need is a new heart. Yeah, my heart was very calloused. And it was hard for me to accept his love and his forgiveness for what it really is.

And he's just showing me now that he does love me. And I don't have to try to think it through of why he does. He just does because he's God.

He's a God of love. And he's starting to break those chains of bondage that were wrapped around my heart. And he's making it easier for me to love people in the way that he loves them instead of being judgmental of them.

And he's working on me. That's all there is to it, really. He's just working on me.

Jesus said that you can't pour new wine into old wineskin. And it really is true. You can't patch up that decrepit old thing.

You need something new and something fresh. Well, other people think it's the devil that made me do it. We had one evangelist who fell into sin and he claimed a few months later that someone cast the devil out of him and now he doesn't have any more problems.

Well, it didn't surprise me when I found out a year later that he fell back into his problems again. Why? Because it wasn't the devil that made him do it. Yes, devils have a tremendous ability to tempt man into sin.

The devil knows how to allure people and how to make sin look so beautiful and so wonderful and attractive. But you know something? The devil can dangle a carrot in front of you but there's something inside you that wants that carrot. You see what I'm saying? And that's the way it is with sin.

There's something in us. We have a heart that's bent towards evil. We like evil.

And that's why when the devil presents it there's something in us that makes us want to go after it. So that isn't the answer. James said, Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

It comes from within. Now, the problem is our heart. That's when you really get down to the bottom of the matter.

The problem is our heart. The heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked. Who can know it? It's rotten through and through.

This little phrase here, desperately wicked, by the way, is actually just one Hebrew word. And really, desperately wicked, in a sense, those words kind of reflect what it is. But really, literally, that word in the Hebrew just simply means incurable.

And every other time that word is used in the Old Testament, it's referring really to a physical malady, a sickness or a wound that is beyond cure. There's no hope for it. And that is the human heart.

It's a picture of the human heart. You can't heal the miserable creature. There's no remedy.

There's no treatment. There's only one hope. God does have an answer.

God does have an answer. It's called repentance. Repentance is God's answer to a habitual sin.

Now, I'd like to just take a few minutes and talk about four steps of the process of repentance. The process of repentance begins when the all-seeing eye of an almighty God zeroes in to your inner man, which is laid open before God. You know, you have an inside world.

You have an inner man. It's the place where you think and you dream and you hope and you make your decisions, and it's closed off to everyone else. But God sees your inner man, and God zeroes in and starts shining his light on your inner being.

And all the faults and all the sin and the depravity is shown up. Suddenly, when that happens, you feel this sensation coming up within your soul. It's called conviction.

Conviction. It's the Holy Spirit showing you that there's something in your life that's not right. Whether you're unsaved and you don't yet know the Lord, and it's everything that's messed up.

Or maybe you have come to the Lord, but you've only gone so far, and God shines his light in your heart and exposes sin and exposes fault and so on, and you feel this feeling. It's called conviction. And then when the heart is laid open and exposed, something happens.

You respond. You respond. One way or another, even if you ignore it, you are responding to that conviction.

I've always had conviction. I've always had a habitual sin in my life before I became a Christian since I was young. When I became a Christian, I've had conviction, but it still didn't stop me.

Then I started looking at myself and looking at my heart and just seeing how selfish, self-centered I was and just a lot of envy, jealousy, just all those things in my heart. And I realized I couldn't change it, and I was really helpless into changing it because I tried for years and I couldn't do it. Whenever I was about to sin, I knew that it was going to be sin, and I felt the conviction.

The problem was that I did, to some extent, have a relationship with the Lord, and I knew that he was forgiving. So what I did is I said, well, I know this is sin and I'm convicted, but I'm going to do it anyway. I did it, and then I took the Lord's grace for granted is what I did.

I did the sin and then repented afterwards because I was ashamed of what I had just done. Eventually, Christ got through my defenses. Like I said, he touched me.

I mean, I experienced his love, and now I want to love people. I want to give mercy to people as he has given mercy to me. Now, many people immediately go into damage control.

They quickly set themselves at work to try to cover that wound. God has exposed it and laid the heart open, and they quickly go to trying to cover that wound. They don't want to see the sin.

They don't want to acknowledge the selfishness or the pride. They don't want God to expose the lack of real love and real compassion for other people there. They don't want to acknowledge any of that.

They don't want to admit fault. They don't want to change, and they're not willing to do what it takes to really change. Solomon said, He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses them and forsakes them will find compassion.

And the apostle John said, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Praise the Lord. Now, this word confess in the Greek is an interesting word.

It really means to agree with someone. That's really what confess means. And when you use it in the context of the Bible, it means that God has exposed the sin in your life, and something happens in your heart, and you say, God, you're right.

You're right, Lord. I confess. I agree with you.

That is in my life, and I need to repent of it. Help me to repent of it, and I'll do it. And when I had to confess what was going on, that was just like one of the major things, because I didn't think I had a problem.

I mean, I thought everything, you know, as long as I keep hiding everything, I wanted to hide and continue to walk in darkness. And I was recently reading a book, and it let me know where I was at, that that's why I didn't have a relationship, because I wanted to hide everything. And if I could hide from people and not have a relationship with them, then I was hiding from God, because like I said, I was in delusion.

I didn't have a problem. That's what I thought. But now the blinders are somewhat being taken off, and I'm seeing clearly.

I see that I have a big problem. What he's doing now is he still convicts me of before I sin, but when I feel that conviction, I turn to him, and I ask him to help me through it, because I can't do it on my own power. But the opposite of confessing, and there is an opposite, there's another way to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

It's called self-justification. Suddenly you set to work at justifying yourself. You start minimizing your sin.

Well, it's not that bad. Come on. Everyone has a few little struggles.

I mean, what's the big deal? Or you just play it all down like it's not that bad. Or another thing is people rationalize it. Well, everyone has something.

What does God expect? Me to be perfect? And we just throw out these flippant little statements. Or some people even try to shift the blame off themselves. Well, I do that because that person makes me mad.

Or look at the way she's dressed. What do you expect me to think like? And what we're trying to do is avoid God's conviction in our lives. As the person goes into damage control, he immediately attempts to heal the wound that God has inflicted on his heart.

You see, that's what he does. It's God that has inflicted that wound in his heart. And he immediately starts to try to cover it up.

And so as he does that, a callousness forms over that wound. And that callousness becomes hard. If you look at callouses, they're always harder than your skin.

Your skin is soft. But when you've got a callous on there, it's hard. And that's what happens.

The writer of Hebrews says, Be careful lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The book of Ephesians talks about those who are calloused and hard-hearted. It says that they will be filled with darkness and excluded from the life of God.

Excluded from the life of God. The book of Proverbs says, A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy. And the book of Romans even goes further.

Very pointedly, Paul just pointed his finger right at the unsaved, the people who would not repent. And he said, Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, God is storing up wrath for you. It's a frightening thing to turn away from what God is saying in your life.

Many people become so hard-hearted that they just don't even feel the conviction of the Lord anymore. There's many people who claim to be Christians but never feel convicted about anything. I am concerned about people that say they're Christians and everything's always a big party, you know, and it's all laughing and carrying on, having fun, doing this, doing that, and there's never any conviction about what's in their life.

I get very concerned about people like that. Do they really know Jesus Christ? Because if you know Jesus Christ, if you walk with God, then you're going to constantly feel that sense of conviction. It's not that you walk around miserable or beating yourself or anything else, but you understand the conviction of the Lord.

All right, well, some people do open their hearts to God. Some people do open up to the Lord. You know, not everyone turns away from Him.

Some open their hearts, and when a person opens their heart to the Lord's conviction, something happens. They feel godly sorrow over their sin. They feel true remorse over what they are like inside and the things that they do and the way they think.

Now, we're not talking about the worldly sorrow that the Apostle Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians. He talked about those who had worldly sorrow. Some people have a worldly sorrow.

They see the wrong in their lives. They see what's wrong in their hearts, but instead of responding in faith, God, free me. God, I repent.

They get into this whining unbelief. Oh, I'm no good. You know, that's right.

I'm just never going to make it. I mean, what's the sense of even trying? You know, you're right, God. I'm worthless.

And they get in this whining thing. That is not repentance. And many people think that that's repentance, but it's not.

It's just a whining thing, you know, and they never really repent of their sin. Other people, especially those who are in habitual sin, are very guilty of this. They get in a cycle of sin, you know, a constant cycle.

They commit that sin, the sin that they've been doing all their lives. And then after they commit that sin, they feel bad about it. Oh, I shouldn't have done that.

I swear, Lord, I'll never do that again. They go to their wives. I swear, I'll never go out and drink again.

I promise you, that's it. I really mean it this time. I'll never go out on you again, or whatever the sin is.

I swear, I really mean it. They make resolutions, and with all the determination in their heart, they mean it when they say it. But then, a week or two later, when that temptation comes, there's no strength.

They're absolutely helpless. The temptation comes, and there they go, once again, following after that sin. That's not repentance.

That's human resolution. And you cannot repent. You can't break free on your own strength.

It's not possible. You need a new heart. You need God to do something for you.

I look back. I realize that a lot of worldly sorrow was a characteristic of my Christianity. I would say the things that I thought that Jesus would be happy with.

I would repent the way I thought repentance was, and it was more of that, you know, staying in that, oh, poor is me. Look at my circumstances. I can't believe what I've actually gotten myself into.

And I'd go into a cycle of sin where I would be okay, and then I would hide from my wife, and hide from the church, and hide from my friends. And then the reality of my sin would catch up with me, and I'd run into this little repentance and never really giving my heart fully to the Lord and never really having God in my heart and pleading with Him to remove the wickedness that I have inside. I would get convicted, say I'm

sorry, and then turn around not having any control because I was trying to do everything in my own power.

And yet when I was sorry, it was a selfish sorrow. It was more of a sorrow of the things that I was losing, the things that I would, it would cost me. I wasn't really concerned with the damage I was doing to other people, my family, how I was hurting my family, my children, my wife, and everybody involved with me.

Through my drug addiction, I would be sorry that I spent all my money. I'd be sorry that I wasn't able to do the things that I should have done. Sorry with the relationship that I had with my son that I lost, my relationship was in and out.

Though he never saw me do drugs, his mom knew, and I couldn't be around him. But I wasn't sorry to God. I wasn't sorry because it didn't please God.

But it wasn't a conviction type of sorrow or a godly sorrow. It was just a sorrow that, oh, look what I did to my family. Look at the money I spent.

And it was that type of thing. And within time, I'd be back out doing it again. But now that I truly have repented and truly came to God and said, you know, Lord, I am sorry.

I didn't just hurt my family. I hurt you. I hurt your son and everything he did for me on the cross.

I made a mockery of because I really wasn't sorry because I loved my sin more than I loved him. God sees inside. I could hide it from everybody else, but God sees everything.

And I just had to, one day I just had to turn to him and say, okay, I'm at the end of my own power. I'm at the end of my rope, the end of my ability. I've reached the limitation of what I can do.

And now, you know, God, it's on you now. You know, I gave it up to him. The person who is responding to the Lord feels a godly sorrow over their sin.

They feel a godly sorrow over the way that they are. They become broken about the way that they are. Something inside of them just wells up, a grief overcomes them.

Oh, God, look at me. What am I to do? They just feel completely undone. Wretched man that I am.

What am I to do? And there's that sense of overwhelming grief over their sin. It's called brokenness. They've been broken by the Lord.

And you know what happens when a person is broken by the Lord? A hatred for that sin begins developing in their heart. You start seeing the ugliness and the selfishness of it. You start seeing what it's done to your loved ones.

You begin to see how it's grieved a holy God. You see how it's ruined your life. You see the consequences.

Everywhere you look in life, you see devastation because of your sin, because of what you have done, because of the selfishness and the pride that's inside you and the way you treat other people. You look around and your family's destroyed. Your marriage is just in shambles.

Maybe you've lost your job. Maybe you've even been thrown in jail. Everything is decimated because of your sin.

And you begin to hate it. I'm going to read a quote from Charles Finney, the greatest revivalist who ever lived. He lived about 150 years ago and preached in America.

And this is what he said. He saw real conversions. He saw when people really became Christians, not just kind of joined themselves to the evangelical movement and kind of mimicked other people and just kind of followed along with the crowd.

No, he saw people radically changed for Jesus Christ. This is what he said. To one who truly repents, sin looks very differently than it does to him who has not repented.

Instead of looking desirable or fascinating, it looks odious and detestable. He is astonished that he could ever have desired such a thing. But unrepentant sinners may look at sin and see that it will ruin them because God will punish them for it.

They can see that, but it still appears in itself desirable. They love it. And the truth is, if it could end in happiness, they would never think of abandoning their sin.

That's very frightening. It should make us examine our hearts. You see, when you have been broken by God over that sin, something changes in your perspective of it.

And once that has happened, you come to the next step. Something begins to happen inside you. Once godly sorrow has set into your heart, something changes inside.

There's a turning. There's a transformation. Something becomes new.

It's not a slight little alteration. You know, one day you're going this way, and all of a sudden, someone presents the gospel to you, let's say. Oh, okay, I'll join your crowd.

So you make a slight little shift. You know, you get rid of a few things and add church to the picture and kind of read some books. Okay, I'll go like this, you know.

And there's a slight alteration in your life. No, repentance is not like that. Repentance means you're walking this way.

You're going your own way in life, self-will, your way, what you desire. And God comes on you with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And suddenly something breaks inside you, and there's a complete 180.

And you completely change your direction. And now you're going to serve God with your life. That's repentance.

A turning inside. It's not just that you turn away from sin, but you also turn to God. Something's different.

You have a love for God beginning to develop inside your heart. I worry about many people in the so-called evangelical movement who claim to love God, and it just rolls right off the tongue. Oh, yes, I love the Lord with all my heart.

Oh, do you? Then why is it that you're obsessed with the things of this world? Why is it that God is so small in your life? Why is it that you really don't care about other people? If you really love God with all your heart, then why is it that nothing's really changed in your life? You see, when you've repented, when you've been broken, the first commandment becomes livable. You can't love the Lord your God with all

your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind in your own strength. It just becomes shallow and superficial.

It becomes nonsense. But when God breaks your heart inside, then something happens. A hatred of sin and a love for God begins to develop.

Praise the Lord. Now that I truly have repented and truly came to God and said, You know, Lord, I am sorry. I didn't just hurt my family.

I hurt you. I hurt your son and everything he did for me on the cross. I made a mockery of because I really wasn't sorry because I loved my sin more than I loved him.

But now I do love him more than I love my sin, and he's teaching me how to dislike my sin and how to put forth an effort to love others and to not be so concerned about my own needs and my own selfish desires but to help others and to just be like that, you know, instead of self-centered. I need to be sorry that I'm not pleasing to God, you know, and by being sorry that I'm not pleasing to God, I can have a true repentance, you know, repent before God. Like David, you know, repent before God.

I sinned against you and you only, and I need to start there. Forget about the world, how the world views me. In those days, I know God will restore my relationship if I repent to him only.

God has only given one answer to overcoming habitual sin, and that is repentance. If you want to break free from the power of habitual sin, you simply have to repent. And that brings us to the fourth point.

If there has been true repentance, John the Baptist says, there will be fruits of repentance. There will be fruits of repentance. If you've truly repented of your sin, there's going to be a noticeable change in your life, and it doesn't just mean that you just start going to church.

No, something about you as a person is different. Before there was death, now there's life. Before there was selfishness, now there's a concern for others.

There's a drastic change within you as a person. Our ministry that I, the ministry I work for is Pure Life Ministries, and our job in life is to help men who are bound up in habits of sexual addiction. And as part of what we do is we often deal with the wives of men who have been bound up in sexual addiction.

And a lot of these wives come to us devastated. They thought they were marrying a godly man. They thought they were marrying someone who loved God.

And the man didn't tell them the whole story when they were courting and so on. And so they've been going on sometimes for years in this double life, and the wife doesn't even know about it. She thinks her husband is a Christian, someone who's following the Lord.

And she wants to believe the best about him. And then suddenly one day maybe she's going through the drawers, and all of a sudden there's an X-rated magazine in the bottom of the sock drawer or something. And she looks at that thing in horror, and suddenly the only thing she can think of is, My God, who am I married to? Because the reality of what that man has been living in hits her immediately.

And it's devastating. And this woman who has trusted her husband with all her heart, never thought that there was a reason not to trust him. Now she comes to us full of confusion, and often loved ones are telling them, You need to leave this guy.

You'll never be able to trust him. And she's in confusion. What do I do? Can I trust him? And what we tell these wives is, Maybe.

But listen, this is what you need to look for. Fruits of repentance. If this man is in the process of repentance, if something is changing in his heart, there's going to be a difference.

There's going to be something different about him. Does he have a hunger for God? We often tell the wives, Ask these questions. Do you see a hunger for God? Or is it basically the same person, just kind of doing things a little bit different? Or is he really going after God? Is he spending time with God every day in the Bibles? Does the Bible seem to come alive to him now? Is he always talking about the Lord and the things of the Lord with an excitement and an enthusiasm? Or is he just kind of the same old person? Another thing is, another fruit of repentance is the man is beginning to take responsibility for his actions.

He's not the same old guy that always blame shifts, always rationalizes behavior, minimizes his sin and his faults. If he's doing that about some things, then you can count on it that he's doing it about his sexual sin as well. But if there's been a change, now he's going to be quick to say, You know, I'm wrong, honey.

I don't know what got into me. I know I did that. I'm sorry.

I was just messed up. I'm wrong. I'm sorry.

That's someone who's changing inside. There's a fruit of repentance there. Does this man seem like he's been broken? Is there a softness to his look and his face now? Or does he still have that hardness? Does he still have that lack of concern about other people? Does he have just a lack of compassion? Is he quick to anger? Is he still impatient? All these things that he was before, it's not that he suddenly becomes a perfect person.

It's not that, but something's different. There's something just has changed inside him, a softening. He's been broken.

There's a contrition about him. He's been humbled. That's the fruit of repentance.

Something's different. And it's a process. As a man goes through, or a woman goes through, as they're being changed by God, something's happening.

And it doesn't always, in every case, happen immediately in one fell swoop. Sometimes it's a process. God just keeps breaking them.

But do you see them responding to the Lord? Maybe you're watching this show today, and maybe God's dealing with you. Is there something different about your life? That's how you can tell if you really are in the process of repentance. My outward person is like a... It was hard.

And I couldn't never let my inner man come out because my outer man was so hardened that it couldn't produce fruit because the shoot couldn't come out of me, you know, like a seed. And he has broken down that outer man. And although I may not see a lot of fruit, I know that the plant that was inside me, that God has placed there, it's starting to come out.

And in the future, I look forward to producing fruit, and I know God is going to produce fruit in me. I know that I'm a changed man, and I await the fruit to come. He's just making me, like I said, just a person who is being able to accept people more for who they are and love them for who they are, not what I want them to

be, just because I'm starting to learn to accept his love the way, you know, he accepts me for who I am, and it's making it easier for me to, in return, give that love out to other people.

And he's restoring friendships and relationships and things like that that I have screwed up because of my sin. And the fruits that I've seen from that is restoration in relationships, but more importantly, I think, is the restoration with my relationship to God. I just have to keep being submissive with my will and listening to the Lord's and not going by what I feel is right, but what I know is right.

And how I do that is by just reading his word and accepting it for what it is and not trying to make it some big theological thing and always trying to think through it, but just accept it. And one is with my son. You know, I'm able to... One time his mother told me I'd never see him again, never talk to him again.

She was going to go through the court systems, and that's not true. Now I can talk to him, I can go see him, and God has given me another chance with that, and that's through true repentance to God, you know, telling him how sorry I really am that I'm sinning against him. It makes me think about being an example to my son now.

I can show him what a true man of God is, and I pray for that all the time. Well, the fruit for me is just in everyday life, I mean, in simple things, just being... just my awareness is not on myself anymore, you know. I'm not trying to protect myself like I used to.

I mean, I'm just open to people, and I just want to give to people. I want to, you know, give mercy to them, you know, like Christ has given me mercy. I'm trying to have relationships.

I'm trying to be more honest and open with people, and so to me, that's a start. That's a start, just going from there, just being honest, confessing, and because I'm at the place now, I enjoy seeing others, you know, and trying to help others and bless others, you know, and just taking on a what-would-Jesus-do attitude. The accountability, as I forestated, has helped a lot.

So that's some fruits I'm seeing, and when my counselor talks to me, and he tells me, okay, Rick, I see that you're doing this, and you're doing that, and it's good, and it's positive, that's some fruit for me. We're getting there. So I thank God for his mercy, and that he rescued me, and through his discipline and his teaching, he's restoring me to a person that is not slave to my sin anymore.

All right, so what do you do? You can't make God convict you of sin. You can't make God shine his holy light into your inner man and expose all the sin. How can you make God do that? You can't.

You can't make yourself broken. What are you going to do? Just, you know, kind of work up some tears or something? You can't make brokenness happen. What are you going to do? Well, I'll tell you, there is an answer, and I think the church has pretty much lost it, it seems like.

We've been so quick to make excuses for sin, and to, you know, oh, well, I was the, you know, my father was an alcoholic, and that's why I do the things I do. You know, all these rationalizations and not taking responsibility, and so we've gotten off track of what it means to pray through, to pray through. You mean I've got to pray for repentance? Yes.

You have to get on your face before God in a determination, banging on the door, seeking, knocking, refusing to quit until God answers that prayer. God, I'm unbroken. God, I've got a hard heart.

God, I've got a callousness about me. I don't seem to care about anyone. Please, God, change my heart.

And you don't pray that for five minutes. Maybe you pray it for an hour one day, but nothing seems to happen. Well, then you've got to go to work.

Well, then you get up the next day, and you pray it again. And if it doesn't happen that day, you get up the next day, and you pray again. You refuse to let go of the hem of his garment until you get what you need.

You're going to be like Jacob, who wrestled with the angel of God, and wouldn't let him go until you got the blessing you needed. And you know what happened to Jacob. It wasn't that he suddenly got, oh, everything's great now.

He gets cattle and sheep and stuff. No. Jacob got a new nature, and with it, a new name.

He became known as Israel. And Israel became the father of an entire nation. Praise the Lord.

And God will give you that, too, if you'll seek him for it. Seek him relentlessly. Seek him without quitting.

Seek him without stopping, no matter what. Determined to lay hold of God and the things of God. If you'll do that, he'll answer that cry of your heart, I promise you.

Let's pray. Jesus, I do thank you, Lord. I thank you, Lord, that there is a way into heaven.

It's not out of our reach. It's not beyond our ability to find it, Lord. It's there for the hungry heart, the seeking heart.

And I thank you for it, Lord. And I pray, God, that you will help these and those who watch this show, Lord, to find that brokenness, to find that true repentance, God. Set us free, oh God, and make us new creatures in Christ, I pray.

In your name, amen. Amen. I know we talked about a lot of stuff today, but the one thing I'm really hoping will stick with you is that the next time you feel the conviction of the Lord come on you about something, is that you'll just say yes to Jesus.

If the subject of this program has touched your heart, take the time to do an in-depth study on your own. To assist you, we've put together a comprehensive list of some of the very best books, audio and videotape teachings that address this subject. If you'd like a free copy of that list, or if you'd like to purchase a videotaped copy of the program, just visit our website at www.crosstv.com or call us at 1-877-CROSS-TV.

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