

## Facing Giants: The Giant of Addiction, 5/10/21

In our series Facing Giants we are talking about topics that the church is often silent on, but God is not. And many people feel trapped, ashamed, isolated and the only one who struggles. The reality is that the church is for people who don't have it altogether. We always say that Brandywine is a place where it's OK not to be OK, and we want to help you not stay that way. Last week Matthew shared a powerful message about the Giant of Family Dynamics. Today we are tackling the Giant of Addiction. Did you know that the term "Addict" has its roots in the Latin **myth of Addictus**? The myth tells of a slave who is set free from his master but became so accustomed to his chains, that he wandered the land with his chains still attached even though he could have removed them at any time.<sup>1</sup> For some of us this describes us right now. **[Title Slide]** Something in our lives has its grip on us so tightly that you can't even picture life without it. If you are honest you have a love/hate relationship with it. You know that it's dysfunctional, you know that it has you in bondage, you know it's eating your soul and destroying relationships and yet you can't picture life without it. Maybe you have tried to stop. You have tried to change. You have tried to pray it away, maybe you've gone to get treatment, maybe you had some success for short periods of time only to return to your chains. I want you to know that the Word of God offers help and hope through a relationship with Jesus Christ and he stands ready to unshackle you whenever you are ready.

Now before we go any further, we need to do a brief survey of addiction today. Even if you don't struggle with addiction, we have people in our lives that do, or you may have tendencies...Let me give you a simplified clinical definition: **Addiction is a compulsive desire accompanied by behavior that has some reward, but adverse effects.**<sup>2</sup> **Compulsive:** You don't control it, it controls you, and typically your compulsion grows in intensity and appetite, Guns N' Roses, Mr. Brownstone: "I used to do a little but a little wouldn't do so the little got more and more." **Behavior:** There are dozens and dozens of addictions: Alcohol, drugs, food, shopping, gambling, some are done in darkness: like pornography or cutting, some are considered more socially acceptable, like vaping and social media. **Reward:** Often neurological, dopamine in the brain, or you it makes you feel alive, strong, in control, gives you attention, or it numbs the pain. But it has **adverse effects:** These effects are multifaceted: physical health problems, psychological and emotional disorders, addictions tend to bring isolation, increase likelihood of hiding, lying, and alienating relationships, just to name a few. Addicts are all on some spectrum of mild to severe. Some are functional in our addictions- we can still hold down a job, serve in church and manage a relationship...Some have train wrecked their lives: relationships and families, our physical health, we've lost our job, money, many have lost their lives- DE has the second highest Overdose death rate in America.<sup>3</sup> Addiction is not one size fits all... it is biological, psychological, genetic, and epi-genetic, physical, emotional, relational, and certainly it is spiritual. And because of its complexity it's often controversial. There are different paths to treat it- step programs, interventions, cognitive therapy, drug treatment therapy, in

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northpointrecovery.com/blog/slave-addiction-origins-word/>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Webster and Celebrate Recovery definitions.

<sup>3</sup> <https://bedrockrecoverycenter.com/drug-abuse-statistics/>

some denominations emphasize deliverance services...There is now a multi-billion-dollar addiction treatment industry. The purpose of my sermon is not to evaluate all of these, many of them are helpful. And we are not going to overcome and solve all our addiction problems today. Every message could be a series. No short cuts and cheat codes. But the journey of 1000 miles starts with a step. For those caught in addiction- your theme verse needs to be:

**Philippians 1:6** *Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* Some of you this message will be the turning point for you.<sup>4</sup> That was my journey with my addiction to pornography which began as a pre-teen and kept me captive for the next decade of my life. God was doing many things in my heart to prepare me for freedom, but my turning point was when the Spirit used the preaching of the message of freedom in Christ. We are going to anchor this message in Jeremiah 2 where I believe God gives us a portrait of addiction and what's at its core. The two parts of this message: The Nature of Addiction and the Nature of Recovery.

### **The Nature of Addiction:**

**Its source:** We have lots of appliances in our house- toaster, dishwasher, refrigerator, air-fryer. But all our appliances all have the same source- electricity. Same with addiction. Dozens of manifestations, many causes and it's complex, but they all have the same source. Bible tells us that addiction at its core is always spiritual. This was the case with the Jewish people in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC when Jeremiah is writing. They were increasingly and compulsively drawn to the worship of the gods of their neighbors- the Assyrians and Egyptians. They became totally hooked on the practices that accompanied this worship- constructing idols, sex practices, rituals, celebrations of their gods. **Jeremiah 2:12-13** <sup>12</sup>*But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols...*

<sup>13</sup>*My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.* This is vivid picture of addiction: Forsaking the true water source, and Constructing wells that we think can hold water, we go to them over and over again, but they are broken, even harmful. This is the **heart of addiction:** *Taking something or someone (even good things) and elevating them to God status,* something we must have in our lives in order to have meaning, to cope with life, to be satisfied. They become functional gods that we turn to find life, but can never hold the weight of our greatest needs, and will rob us of true life. At its source, addiction is not a substance problem, a food problem, or a spending problem, At its source it is a worship problem.

**Its Seduction:** Jeremiah 2:23-27 lays out four ways addiction seduces us. A portrait of addiction.

**#1 Denial:** <sup>23</sup>*How can you say, "I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals?" See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done.*

Israel says, "I'm fine. Idolatry? What idolatry? I don't have a problem." Anyone who has experience with addicts knows how this works. The constant denying and minimizing... "I'm not an alcoholic, I just like to have fun." "This is how I unwind." "I could stop anytime I want to."

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Mark Batterson sermon for some language here.

“I’m not addict to food, I’ve just have a big appetite.” “This is just how my family is.” “You are just a prude.” “I’m not angry, I’m Irish!” Addiction has a blinding effect on the reality and the seriousness of our problem.

**#2 Uncontrollable Craving:** <sup>23</sup>*You are a swift she-camel running here and there,* <sup>24</sup>*a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving—in her heat who can restrain her?*

Shockingly, Jeremiah compares Israel’s spiritual addiction to an animal in heat. Not a very dignified comparison, is it? And yet it is so accurate. Addiction makes us less human and more like untamed, instinctual beasts, just following our cravings. It makes us turn off moral reason, we tune out the whisper of the Spirit saying, “Don’t do this.” We block out what those closest would say to us. “Who can restrain us?”

**#3 Life Destroying:** <sup>25</sup>*Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry.*

Have you seen desert ultra-marathon runners  who race over 5 days in the Sahara Desert 150 miles? The smile on her face is disturbing... The imagery of Israel’s spiritual addiction is more like this-  someone running in the desert to the point where their shoes have worn out, their water has run out, they fall down and yet they keep going to their own destruction. Addiction will burn you out, beat you up and eat you alive.

**#4 Life Defining:** <sup>26</sup>*But you said, “It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.”* <sup>27</sup>*They say to wood, “You are my father,” and to stone, “You gave me birth.”*

This is the scary picture of addiction isn’t it? Addiction will seduce you to the point that you are in so deep you believe the lie of Satan- not only that you will never get freedom, but that your addiction is what defines you. The bottle, the pill, the money, the comments on social media are closer to you and gives you more feeling, meaning and connection than God, your family or your friends. Just like physical birth- It’s what gives you life- I live for this food, I live for these purchases, I live for this attention. This is the biblical **portrait of addiction: Denying, craving, destroying, defining**. Ahh, but there is hope! Your story doesn’t end here- Not when God writes your story.

### **The Nature of Recovery**

Let me make a few comments off the top. Recovery is a process just as sanctification is a process. And that process may look different for different people. For some it starts with immediate deliverance. In fact, for some people God miraculously takes away not only the behavior but the desire. In my pastoral experience: for most, it is a long battle that has 3 steps forward and 2 steps back where God may never completely remove the desire but gives you what you need to persevere faithfully. Regardless of how God delivers, the important thing is that He does. Biblical recovery always has at least 3 characteristics that our text in Jeremiah hint at, but we find explicit in the NT.

**Recovery Begins with Repentance:** In Jeremiah 3 over and over again you here the call of the Lord- “Return oh faithless Israel.” This is the idea of the term repentance which involves three steps, which are at the core of the 12-step program. **#1 Admit you have a problem**, the Bible

calls this confession, which means speaking the truth about what your addiction is- it is sin against God. It is not just acting on your biological instincts or following your heart, it is sexual sin. It is not just blowing off some steam and having a good time, it's the sin of drunkenness. It's not just that you like to shop, it's the sin of materialism. We first confess this to God, but **James 5:16 Confess your sins to one another so that we may be healed.** When we begin to name it, it begins to lose its power, because sins of addiction hide in the dark where no one knows. This was a gamechanger for my recovery from pornography, when I began to get honest with myself, with God and a few brothers in Christ. **#2 You are powerless to overcome your addiction but God can.** This requires humility. You can't do it...you've proved that! Biblical recovery requires faith. Your addiction seems so big and powerful, but God is bigger and more powerful. **#3 You must turn to God in surrender.** You aren't running your own life anymore. Your best efforts have gotten you to this place, running in the desert. So why would you keep trying to control your life? God is arms open wide, ready for you to place your life in his strong and capable arms.

**Recovery is by Grace NOT works.** From 15 years of personal and pastoral study and experience, let me tell you what never works. **"Try harder."** "I'm going to just try harder to get myself together." "OK, that was the last time I watch porn, I'm never doing that again", and so you go into sin management, behavior modification, you clean yourself up... **Jeremiah 2:22 Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilt is still before me," declares the Sovereign Lord.** Why? Because we can't clean ourselves up on the outside without addressing the condition of our hearts. We are incapable of doing the cleaning and it's just a matter of time until the addiction returns in one way or another. We need someone else to do the cleaning that we are incapable of doing from the inside out. The cleaning of forgiveness, of giving us a new heart and will, of giving us power to overcome. What we need is the gift of **grace**. Someone else to do the work we aren't capable of doing on the inside. There is only one gift of grace capable of that: the gospel grace of Jesus Christ.

**Isaiah 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.**

**<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

At the cross where he died, Jesus took your addiction, every time you looked to food as your god, every time the needle went into the arm or you worshipped at the rush of sexual images on your phone, every act of self-harm, of self-absorption- Jesus absorbed on the cross in his body. It was nailed there and killed. Jesus offers forgiveness for our addictions so that we can let go of the self-loathing, hiding, guilt, shame, feelings of worthlessness associated with addiction. Jesus offers healing of our deepest wounds. Offers peace with God. Jesus offers to define our lives instead of addiction. And in his resurrection from the dead, the Jesus offers real power over our compulsive desires and behaviors. Not some mental trick...there is real power.

**Recovery: We Embrace the Lover of Our Souls:** As amazing as this grace is, if it is just a transaction: just merely an intellectual assent to truth, or something we get from God, we will not have the power to truly change us. It might have the power to remove our guilt and make us feel better, but not change us. It must move from a spiritual transaction to a spiritual relationship with God. In Jeremiah 2- God depicts his early relationship with his people like two young lovebirds. v.2-3 <sup>2</sup>*"This is what the Lord says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.* <sup>3</sup>*Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest."*

Tim Keller says of this passage- *"This is honeymoon language. Why would God use such an unworthy illustration? Because that is what his heart is like. Yes, he is utterly majestic and perfect and doesn't need us, but he has chosen to give his heart to us. He's put you at the center and made you the object of his love."*

And so, to truly and lastingly pursue recovery from addiction we must embrace the lover of our Soul- God himself. He wants you in his arms. And if you aren't in his arms, then you are in the arms of something. Here is the insidious problem with secular recovery. It's an idol exchange. Thomas Chalmers- *Expulsive Power of a New Affection.* *"No one changes bad habits out of just trying. The heart is so constituted the only way to dispossess it of an old affection is through the expulsive power of a new one."*

There was a woman who was a beautiful girl her whole life. Always pursued by men and she became addicted to the feeling that gave her. That ruled her life. Her entire self-image was based on what men thought of her and keeping her external beauty intact, forsaking her character and becoming a shell of the person she once was. Through an act of grace, God began to show her a mirror not of her exterior but her interior. Eventually she became a Christian. She sought freedom from this addiction to her self-image. A friend of hers who was a secular counselor said- *"What you need is to get a good career, marketable skills and be successful career woman so that you won't be controlled by men's opinion and power in your life and you will be self-sufficient."* She replied, *"With all due respect you want me to turn from a typical female idol to a typical male idol? So instead, I will get all my self-esteem and worth from career success. What if I don't want either addiction? Let me build my life on something that can't let me down."*<sup>5</sup>

Jesus will never let you down. *John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

Run into his arms. Close eyes- raise your hand you want freedom. **Broken Beginnings and Hunger for Hope-** [info@brandywine.church](mailto:info@brandywine.church), TEXT: (302) 217-6594

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<sup>5</sup> Idea from Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*