

Sex Food & God

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ONE

Gift Abuse

We have talked about the World of Walking Backward and its discomforts, and how it is very similar to the world of temptation and addiction. In that world, sex, food, and other things are used in a thoroughly backward way, and that goes unnoticed. In fact, addictive behaviors seem natural to those captured by them.

Abusing the Pleasures of Life

Everything involved in addiction is good. If it is food addiction—some variety of bingeing, purging, anorexia, or overeating—just attend a weight-reduction class and you will discover how good food really is. (And you'll be able to get some of the best recipes around.) I can remember attending one such class where the entire time was given over to low-calorie recipes. The woman instructor was going over in detail how to lose weight through eating differently, and she shared a lot of low-calorie desserts. After each recipe there was an “ooh and aah” of appreciation from the women present. Being the lone man, I watched and listened with fascination. Obviously the

women who were there were very enthusiastic about what they were struggling to manage. They thought food was great!

In a group of men or women who are struggling with sexual addiction you would not find them sharing how much they really enjoyed sex (unlike overeaters). But everyone there would assume

Addiction to swallowing glass does not exist. Instead, temptation, compulsion, and addiction involve good things.

sexuality is pleasurable—and a good and great thing to have if managed properly. The problem is the misuse of a good thing.

Julie uses shopping to get her mind off an uncomfortable marriage. She dreads the credit-card bill at the end of the month because it is the only time she has a sense of the problem she is struggling with. Yet if we looked at every item on the bill, it would be something good for someone. Whether

a new outfit for her infant or a new chair for the living room, she could explain the value of each item. Further, she spent a lot of time and care in getting just the right thing. Thought, care, and comforts are not bad, but too much preoccupation and too many expenditures lead to financial disaster. If we walked through Julie's home, however, we would enjoy all the good things we see.

José is an exercise buff. He works as an army recruiter, and in his job he is expected to look trim and muscular. What you would not know is that every evening after work he is at the gym and not home. Megan, his wife, feels abandoned and is losing patience with his explanations about how important exercise is. He does not know it, but he is heading for a divorce. But when he signs the divorce papers, he will look great! Exercise is great too. People who exercise look trim. More than that, the doctors think it's good to do. But when a person is exercising so much that key people in their lives are ignored, a good thing is being misused.

Addiction to swallowing glass does not exist. Instead, temptation, compulsion, and addiction involve good things. So the challenge is to enjoy what comes into our lives and not become mastered by them.

Why is this important to you? Because people who are struggling with food or sex find their inner life a place of discomfort and often confusion. The intention of this book is to show you how to truly enjoy what is inside including the appetites. As you read you will see that everything about you is meant for your good and God's glory. The real issue is how to turn our inner life from a place of discomfort to a healed place of enjoyment, and not slavery.

What's Good About Alcohol and Heroin?

"I can see that sex and food are good things misused," some might say, "but what about heroin and other drugs? They are certainly not good things being misused!"

We have to follow two steps to see how substances misuse the blessings of life. God has given us a good set of chemicals that are designed to bring us pleasure as we are in positive relationships. When we are in family relationships and are sensing attachment, the chemicals oxytocin and vasopressin are present. When we are having fun and romance, dopamine and serotonin are present. When we are sexually involved in a healthy way, testosterone is present. Those chemicals are present throughout healthy relationships. Truly we can't help but believe that they are good things!

But we can get those good things other ways too. Oxytocin and vasopressin likely can be produced by self-absorbed narcissism. Certainly substance abuse (alcohol, drugs) and gambling can produce rivers of dopamine and serotonin. Methamphetamines—meth—also produces serotonin, dopamine, and epinephrine. Pornography and sexual addiction can produce testosterone.

The goal of substance abuse is to produce—and overproduce—the chemicals that flow out of good relationships. *Substance abuse is an end run around relationships: The sensation is everything.* What alcoholism and drug abuse do is manufacture chemicals that are recognizably good. Heroin and drugs are not good things, but they produce the chemicals that were designed to enhance and sustain healthy relationships!

The deeper reality is, our very body chemistry, another good but hidden gift from God, can be misused by drugs and alcohol to circumvent the relationships and achievements that would very naturally produce them in healthy amounts.

As an example, on the Internet there is a Web site that talks about oxytocin; it is called the love drug. We no longer need God because all we have to do is inject oxytocin. The author of the article is dead serious. He maintains that belief in God produces oxytocin, the chemical of secure and caring relationships. So forget God—just get the chemical.

If we follow his logic, we would have the plot from the movie *The Matrix*. There people were submerged in a chemical bath, connected to tubes and electrodes, and their mind was experiencing a virtual world through electronic means. Good positive chemicals are the results of God and relationships with people, but the movie simplified everything and got rid of relationships with people and just substituted chemicals. Or the same result can be gotten in a more everyday way. Instead of spouses and children, let us have a carton of daily pills that can make us feel good without any messy people involved! But Christianity intends that we should feel good and have relationships with God and people at the same time.

So everything involved with temptation, compulsion, and addiction is a good thing. The challenge this book will take up is to show how healthy management of good things stops addiction in its tracks.

Understanding the Source of the Good Gifts

All of the realities involved with addiction are good because a good-hearted God made them that way. That's important because it means originally everything within us was designed to bring us deep satisfaction and joy. If that is so—and it is—it means we can really be hopeful that managing ourselves and having joy is entirely possible.

In the Genesis account of the creation of the earth and Adam and Eve, the constantly repeated reality is that creation is good.

God proceeded to say, “Let there be light, and there came to be light. And God saw that the light was good” (Genesis 1:3-4).*

The Hebrew word for good is *tov*; it refers to something being beneficial. Without light, life would not be, and reality for us would not be seen. It is an understatement to say light is beneficial!

The word *beneficial* is repeated seven times in the chapter for what goes on in each creative day. The refrain from God is that everything He created is good, or beneficial. Notice that it is describing the creations of the six days and the word good is repeated seven times. On the sixth day when animals and humanity (male and female) are created, God said that the beasts, the animals, and the creepy-crawlies all are good or beneficial, as is humanity. Then, a segment occurs wherein two members of the Trinity (almost certainly the Father and the Son) have a conversation. No divine dialogue occurred concerning the light, the waters, the land mass (the earth), the birds, the fish, the stars, the sun and moon, or the animals. But after the divine conversation a man and a woman were made. At that point, God looked over the whole of His creative work, with humanity at the pinnacle, and he said it was “*exceedingly* good,” or “*very* beneficial.”

With the inanimate world—stars, moon, sun, ocean, and land, God stated His opinion: It is good. With animate life—animals and humanity—He gave a blessing. The purpose of the blessing was that this animate life would multiply and fill the earth. The blessing for humanity revolved around ruling the world well.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over all living things that move on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

* The Bible translations used throughout the book are my own. They are true to the original Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible. My desire is to give a rich and expanded but accurate translation of what God has to say through His Word.

God's purpose, as stated earlier in verse 26, was that the earth should be governed; the blessing in verse 28 said that His divine desire and all-powerful providence would be unleashed to bring these good things to their designed purpose—and with the fulfillment of that purpose would come joy!

The purpose of God's blessing on Adam and Eve was to propel all of those good things in the direction of the couple's joy and dignity. Creation was like a big, wonderful box of toy blocks and Tinkertoys. God's blessing would arrange them in such a way that His children would thoroughly enjoy the gifts.

The Person of the Trinity who is given all ultimate credit for the beneficial creation with the blessing residing on it is the Son.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was personally present with the God [the Father], and Divine the Word was continually. This One was in the beginning with God. Everything through Him came to be, and apart from Him not one thing came to be which became (John 1:1-3).

God the Son is the creator of all the benefits of life, and it was His blessing that rested upon all animate life. God is infinitely good; He is incapable of creating that which is not good; and His intention is that life should be benefited and fulfill its purposes. He who died for us is also the One who provided all good things.

This means that when it comes to temptation, compulsion, and addiction, it is a question of *management* and not nullification. The ever present question that a person who is struggling with temptation, compulsion, and addiction should have is, "How can I use what I'm experiencing in a healthy and good way?" (We would have to "uncreate" the world and dismantle ourselves so as to avoid temptation. That probably won't happen.)

Doris is a university student and a sex addict.* She despises what she has become; she despises who she is; she despises her existence.

* As is the case with a number of people whose stories are given in this book, Doris's actual name and circumstances have been changed to protect her privacy.

She despises the young men she gets involved with. She is also a Christian who is desperately ashamed of who she is—and oddly, yet not unusually, she despises sex itself.

She prays a lot. She wants her desires to be taken away. God won't do that. She does not want to be sexual; she deeply despises her body. God won't take away her sexuality. After all, He pronounced her body good. God won't destroy her, nor will He nullify her appetites. What He will do is attempt to introduce her to the proper management of her soul so she can enjoy what He has pronounced good and what He has blessed.

Doris cannot imagine—absolutely cannot imagine—a life where she is not replaying video clips in her imagination of illicit sex, a life where she can positively manage her sexuality and simply turn her mind away from impure or wrong thoughts. And that sense of despondency is precisely the problem. She feels so much a failure that escape seems impossible. Therefore, she is thinking about suicide to end her struggle. She wants to nullify and destroy the good things God has given her. We will see what happened to Doris later in this book, but in a word, nullification or death is not what God wants for us—but life and the management of what He has placed within us.

Creation as Christmas

Most addicts do not view the world and their bodies as a good place to inhabit. That is because of the deep pain involved with compulsion and addiction. What is common with addicts is not uncommon in the church.

All of life is a good gift. Yet in the church in the past and the church today, pressure exists to always reject reality, with its emotions and appetites, as a good gift of God. Sometimes the mind-set of the addict and the mind-set of the church are disturbingly similar.

If you observe certain churches, they function like they exist in an asexual world where only the really evil people have appetites.

They seem uncomfortable with appetites and appear to indulge in self-rejection. (Sometimes it almost seems that the only people who talk about food problems and sexuality are the sitcoms and magazines like *Hustler* and *Playboy*.)

Nervousness about human appetites is not new to the church. A blatant rejection of the body and the material world has happened in the past. During the third century, a religious leader named Mani had a powerfully negative influence on the church. Mani taught a form of *dualism*—that matter was evil, created by a lesser god, and that just spirit was good. Therefore, it did not matter what was done to the body because it was not important. Oddly, this led in two very opposite directions. Some then felt the body should be despised and roughly treated so it would not do anything wrong. Others felt that it did not matter what the body did, so sexual sin and indulgence was permitted. What both approaches had in common was a less than positive view of the human body and what was within.

Christianity, however, views creation as a divine Christmas morning. Let's merge Christmas morning with the creation story in our imaginations.

In our creation/Christmas story, God the Son—with great joy, explosive laughter, and a contagious smile—comes to the door of humanity at the time of creation. In a booming voice He shouts, “Let me in! It's your Christmas. Mine will come later! I have great gifts for you.” We, humanity, come to the door and let Him in with great anticipation. Have you been around people who have a contagious laugh? God has one. The divine Son is laughing with anticipation at sharing His gifts with us. In this scene, we actually find ourselves giggling. (Kids giggle, you know.)

A great sack is over His mighty shoulders. Stooping down next to the tree (which He gives a thoughtful glance), He opens the sack. Immediately, out fly nightingales and sparrows. “That's just the beginning,” He says. He brings out the gifts. A host of them involve food and recreation. Another gift is wine, to lighten the heart. Then, He sweeps His hand over us and grants the gift of

relationships. Another sweep of the hand...and with a great laugh, He says, "I have given you the gift of sexuality. Have pleasure between yourselves. Enjoy the undercurrent of attraction and of life."

Then, a thoughtful expression comes across His face. His eyes look deeply into ours, and sympathetically He says, "I have a mystery gift for you—the gift of pain. It is a great and mysterious benefit. In time I will teach you its meaning and its use."

Lifting His arms over us with great dignity, He declares, "I empower all of these gifts to work for your benefit. The impulses of all reality will conspire for your blessing."

Then He laughs again and says, "Have fun."

THE GIFT OF PAIN

In the original creation story, in the Garden, our ancient parents enjoyed the gifts and got to know the Giver. Even though they were created as adults, they still had to figure out how they worked. Imagine that Adam was walking along and he stubbed his toe. The first human "ouch" echoed through the earth. Fascinated, Eve turned to him and asked what had happened. "The oddest thing," he said. "This sensation shot from my foot right into me and I instantly pulled my foot back." Then he said, "Well, I won't do that again. In fact, I will call that the 'I-won't-do-that-again' sensation."

Eve, who was very bright, took her toe and pushed it against the same rock Adam had stubbed his toe against. "What a neat invention. That feeling warns me when I press my toe against the rock, and it gave you the uncomfortable sensation so you wouldn't do the same thing again. That is clever."

Adam, who was also very bright, said, "Eve, I felt something like this...but different...before God fashioned you. When God asked me if I wanted any of those animals as helpers, a feeling came over me that I found uncomfortable. God told me it was loneliness. Loneliness felt a little like stubbing my toe, except it was deeper,

longer, and more unsettling. When I woke up and saw you, loneliness went away and I felt wonderful.”

Eve smiled affectionately. They both marveled at this thing called *pain*. They thought it was wonderfully clever. Pain reminded Adam to look for Eve. Pain kept Adam from stubbing his toe. Pain warned him when more pain might be coming. “What an amazing gift,” they said.

Before the Fall, pain was a sensation; after the Fall, it was a catastrophe.



Our lives today are so often filled with struggle and inner chaos that we forget the original intent of the many gifts that are ours, especially the gift of pain. Adam and Eve said of pain, “What a neat invention.” We say, “What a catastrophe!”

However, pain is what tells us we need to eat. Without that sense of pain with its discomfort, we would starve to death. Pain tells us that we are alone. As it weighs upon us, hopefully we will respond to its nudge or outright shove so as to seek the company of another. Without the pain of longing and desire, this world would never be populated, and the human race would cease to exist. Every desire has discomfort with it, and every painful physical sensation carries with it a powerful warning. That warning tells us that we must do something positive and wise to deal with the discomfort. But pain can be misused.

Misused Pain

When it comes to addiction and compulsion, pain is the critical puzzle piece. A pastor friend of mine, Mick Andrews, wisely said, “Addiction is the legacy of unaddressed pain.”* His observation from working in the recovery ministry of his church was this: What was ultimately being mismanaged was pain. Pain was intended to

* Mick is the executive pastor at Sunrise Community Church in Sacramento, California.

wake us to the needs and threats of life, but addiction mismanages it. The equation of addiction is—

$$\text{PAIN} + \text{PLEASURE} = \text{ADDICTION}$$

God's intention was that pain should be a blunt but well-intentioned guide through life, much like a grumpy uncle who likes us but straightforwardly tells us when we are making a mistake or taking a misstep. Instead of listening to the grumpy uncle, though, we too often bury him under sugar and muffle his voice with pleasure.

Different Ways of Dealing with Pain

Alexander and Halaway did research on the use of heroin. In their article on their findings, "Opiate Addiction: The Case for an Adaptive Orientation," they noted an odd reality. Two people could be injecting or snorting heroin for six months, and then both would try to stop. One could, and one could not. They saw this over and over again. The time periods were sometimes different, but the results were the same. One was trapped, and one escaped. What was the difference?

They observed that the group that escaped had positive ways of dealing with emotional, relational, and physical pain. Coping mechanisms were present in their lives. Often when they were in pain, they would go to relatives and friends and work through the pain. Those who could not drop the heroin did not have alternative coping mechanisms, so they drowned the pain with a narcotic and experienced some pleasure. The deadly combination seemed to be as we noted above: *Pain plus pleasure leads to addiction.*

A lot of research has been done with high-school students to discover the difference between the students who are drug-resistant and those who are not. Common factors show up over and over again. Students who feel loved and good about themselves can stop smoking marijuana with what appears to be ease. Students who do not feel good about themselves or whose parents are going through a divorce or whose home otherwise has stress and strife cannot easily

drop smoking marijuana. Over and over again the management of pain seems critical to the process.

In the introduction we mentioned the “no-bullets-flying therapy.” Take away the stress and tension, and there was no need for the addiction. Take away the Vietcong threat, and the soldiers’ hearts were free to be happy.

When we look at our culture today, we may easily conclude that many do not have an alternative means of dealing with pain. Alcohol addiction is up 50 percent in one generation—7 percent of the adult population, or 10 million people, are now problem drinkers. The practical ramification of that is, another four people are directly affected by each problem drinker. That means 40 million more lives are affected. The spillover is also that one-third of arrests are to be blamed on problem drinking. One half of highway fatalities are blamed on excessive drinking.

Marilyn and her husband would end each evening by drinking several cocktails. It tasted good and relaxed both of them. This was part of the fabric of their marriage. Then they became Christians. As they grew in their knowledge of the Bible and their participation in the life of the church, the evening habit continued. In some ways it was a point of pride that they were not legalistic. They had freedom in Christ to down some cocktails.

One Bible study organization Marilyn joined wanted to promote her to leadership. To her surprise, one of the rules was that leaders could not drink alcohol. She thought that was a bit much. However, she prayed about it and decided she would comply. As she started to stop her evening drinks, she immediately noticed something. The problems of the day did not drift away in the haze. The tension with relatives, the problems at work, and other stuff hovered like vultures. She was surprised at how handy the alcohol had been at keeping those vultures at a distance.

As she plugged away at keeping the rule of no alcohol, she was forced to pray more about the challenges, especially so she could sleep. She also chose to address the problems that nagged at her in

the evenings. To her joy she found that prayer took away the tension and still left her with objectivity; the alcohol did not do that. She also found the courage through faith and prayer to address her daytime world. She no longer had the “mute button” of drinking. Now healthy pain and emotional discomfort could do their good work—the good work of telling her that something needed to be addressed in her life and relationships.

With the continual misuse of alcohol and food comes a whole host of adult health problems. The great majority of health costs are directly related to conditions that could be prevented. Diabetes, ischemic heart disease, stroke, cancer, suicide, broken bones, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, sexually transmitted diseases, and hepatitis are just some of the preventable conditions that flow out of succumbing to temptation, compulsion, and addiction. Addictive behaviors are a tragedy, but a preventable one.

What an addicted person does is like eating chocolate with their left hand to kill pain while scalding their right hand on the stove. As a solution to the scalding, it does not quite work.

The Pain of Unnatural Emotions

Pain was meant to be a good gift—warning us of threats, prompting us to seek food, relationships, and benefit, and reminding us not to repeat our mistakes. But when we succumb to temptation, compulsion, and addiction, a whole new host of pains is brought into our lives. Unnatural feelings we were never intended to experience come our way. Those truly unnatural emotions are *shame*, *guilt*, and *worthlessness*.

Many therapists and pastors who work with the addicted believe that *shame* is the ocean addicted people swim in. No one takes pride in having the predominate reality of their lives be sex, food, gambling, work, or something else. No one who is addicted wants to be viewed like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, the creature who spent his existence pursuing a ring that would give him power.

As he fondled the ring or even thought of it, he would repeat over and over, “My precious, my precious.” It is embarrassing to have the central experience of life be the next sexual encounter or the next meal. Surely we are more than that. But for the addict, with regard to themselves, they are not more than that. With that knowledge, shame envelops the soul.

Guilt also comes, for with the slavery of addiction has to come betrayal of others. The heroin addict may steal from parents, spouse, or friends. The sex addict may have no interest in others as persons, and implicit in immoral sexual encounters is always a betrayal of one’s spouse. The workaholic sooner or later will realize that the God-intended life of relationships has passed by and family and friends have been betrayed by neglect in the process.

Worthlessness is the third unnatural emotion. On the home page of a Web site dedicated to Ana—the practice of anorexia—this statement was found: “If you feel you are the most worthless person in the world, come in—because within, you will find those who feel the same.” Worthlessness is the feeling that I am not valued by others or myself. When, for instance, a woman finds that all the excitement she has in life is to go shopping, a feeling of personal meaninglessness sets in. “Is this all I am? Is this all I can do with my life? Are clerks in stores my only friends?”

If all of this seems strange to you, just imagine the most embarrassing moment in your life, the most shameful moment, and multiply that by a billion. That is where the addict dwells.

God did not intend for us to have those emotions, and he certainly did not intend that they should be the constant companions of many. Yet shame, guilt, and worthlessness make the problem of temptation and compulsion worse.

Several years ago I was giving a seminar at a church in the Bay Area of California on the core values of Christianity. The seminar was called “Setting the Heart Free” and it taught those core values from the book of Romans in the Bible. A couple was attending who never introduced themselves. They just sat and listened as I

explained that God did not want us to live in shame, and one of the reasons Jesus died in our behalf is to take away from us any need to live life in shame. Instead we can confidently come to God the Father for help. The couple listened, the seminar ended, and I went on my way.

A year later that same couple came up with smiles on their faces to me when I was visiting the same church. They told me a striking story. The woman was a stewardess who went all over the world, and her husband stayed home with his own job. As she went away she would find herself involved with various men and become intimate with them. As she was away, her husband would engage in cross-dressing. He would dress as a woman and go out.

She would return to him and confess her wrongdoing, and after she was done, he would confess his own. He would say, "If you want me to leave, I will." She would say the same thing to him. Both of them were completely trapped. As they were telling me this, however, one of them broke into laughter and said, "We were so busy telling each other that we would leave, we never had time to leave." I thought their laughter did not match the seriousness of what they were describing, until the thought struck me that this was the laughter of the rescued and of the redeemed.

The shame, the pain of it . . . was keeping them from the one true source of help, God. Take the pain away, and the addiction loses its strength.

They went on to say that at the previous year's seminar they had heard that Jesus Christ was not ashamed of them—not ashamed of calling them His brother and sister. In fact, His death on the cross was the basis for giving themselves radical permission to take what they were doing to God the Father and share it with Him so that they could find help in their time of need. As they began to do that, they found help. Their shame and guilt started to dissipate, and with that they found the courage to deal with their sins and their relationships. To their immense surprise, as the pain of shame

went down so did the cruel control of the addictive behaviors in their lives.

What was a marvel to them was that the very shame their practices caused was the pain they were trying to bury and forget under the pleasures they sought. It was also the shame, the pain of it, that was keeping them from the one true source of help, God. Take the pain away, and the addiction loses its strength.

Beyond Anesthesia

There are many sources of pain in this life—some comes from relationships, some of it is physical, some comes from the trio of guilt, shame, and worthlessness. Wherever it comes from, the tragic mistake is to take a good gift of God and misuse it to bury pain and find some pleasure.

Using those gifts correctly, however, not only undercuts addiction but also unleashes the heart to truly enjoy the God-provided pleasures of life without shame and regret. All of us realize that life has its fill of good things. What we do not seem to realize is that when we truly enjoy ourselves, the heavens are happy. The Creator of all pleasures wants His pleasures to be delighted in. The inventor of pain wants pain to have its beneficial work.

What would life be like if we used the good things of life in a good way? The first thing we would experience is a depth of relationships that might have eluded us or escaped us. Temptation, compulsion, and addiction are the nonrelational way to experience the chemical treats that come with relationships. Certainly chemical benefits come from healthy relationships, but that is the minor pleasure—the great pleasure is the enjoyment of a particular person and special relationships.

Ultimately alcoholics and pornography addicts burn the bridges to relationships, but when the good things of life are not used as a substitute for relationships, the good people of life appear. Marriages

become what God intended, a reflection of the Trinitarian God and the relationships among the three Persons of the Trinity.

Another crucial relationship is also discovered when the good things of life are not mismanaged. We are actually introduced to ourselves. Compulsive and addicted people find themselves to be bad company. Often they just notice their weaknesses, and they despise the person they have become. But as the fog of temptation, compulsion, and addiction is melted away by the sunshine of health, we can see ourselves clearly. We know our weaknesses well, but now we can discover our strengths and discover the person others and God love. I have often said that the gospel is God's means of introducing us to ourselves. For that introduction to take place, we need to deal with pain and not be captured by some misused pleasure.

When pain is managed and pleasures are controlled, then we will cease being afraid of what is inside of us. Talk to a woman who has tried dozens of diets and ask her how she feels about what is inside of her—the appetites, the will, the emotions, and the mind. She will say she is afraid of what is there. It is not her ally or friend. Instead what is inside is an uncontrollable nuisance. Lower the pain level and let her learn to truly manage her inner life (something we introduce in the coming chapters), and her fear will turn to respect. She will agree with King David when he wrote, “We are awesomely and miraculously made!” (Psalm 139:14).

When the good things of life are managed, we will learn to be cautious about temptation, compulsion, and addiction. We will respect them and know how to avoid them. We will notice the pain that empowers temptation, and then we will deal with the painful mood or situation quickly so our appetites do not carry us away. For instance, we will notice that when we are tired, we start “grazing” from the refrigerator.

When the good things of life are managed, then pain can do its good work. Pain will tell us when we are lonely so we will seek friends. Pain will tell us when we are ashamed or guilty so we will seek God.

Pain will become the gruff but good-hearted uncle God intended it to be. We have other “aunts and uncles,” like pleasure, food, and sex, who are made for a party and stick to us like the best of friends. God does not begrudge us our pleasurable friends—indeed, His Son created them. He merely wants them tamed and beneficial.



Genesis 1 says that everything is good or beneficial, and that all of life is meant to be driven by the blessed purposes of God. In temptation, compulsion, and addiction, the good is bent away from its blessed purpose for something evil. However—and this is incredibly important—if we manage temptation, compulsion, and addiction correctly, all of life can become a treasure house of delight.

And as we use the gift of pain correctly, we keep ourselves from “doing the math”:

$$\text{PAIN} + \text{PLEASURE} = \text{ADDICTION}$$

Of course, the equation also tells us we should lower the pain level in our lives. But it does not tell us *how*. There are additional realities we need to learn about. In this chapter we talked about how to view the pain within ourselves. In the next chapter we will see what is the primary truth we need to understand about God as we struggle with temptation, compulsion, and addiction. That truth will lighten our burdens and set our heart free.