

12 PROVEN STEPS TO OVERCOMING ADDICTIONS

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12 PROVEN STEPS TO OVERCOMING ADDICTIONS

INTRODUCTION

As humans, each one of us has an inbuilt desire to find happiness and fulfilment in life. Tragically, however, what is intended to be a great blessing has, in a vast number of lives today, become one of the greatest curses. Addiction hijacks inbuilt body systems meant for good, turning these to perverted uses with heart-breaking consequences that affect many lives.

Although addiction is terrible, there is hope. In this booklet, I want to bring that hope to you personally, especially if you or someone you love is struggling with addiction. My name is Dr Daniel Banos, and I am an experienced psychologist who has helped many individuals with serious addictions to break free from these and begin a new life. In this booklet, I will explain what an addiction is, and why addictions are so difficult to overcome. I will then outline twelve powerful steps that have been used by many people to escape the power of addiction and make a fresh start. Thousands of people have conquered addictions. So can you!

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Let's begin by defining what addiction is. *Addiction* is an overwhelming urge to do or use something repeatedly, to the point where it may harm the user (Healthdirect, 2018). Addiction is most commonly associated with substances such as drugs and behaviours such as gambling. However, it is possible to be addicted to activities and things that are harmless and even necessary in and of themselves, such as work, food or exercise.

Addictions almost always begin unintentionally. Very rarely does a person plan to become addicted. "I am strong." "I am in control." "Just once won't hurt." All these are common thoughts that are used to rationalise that first sip of alcohol or draft on a cigarette. The individual takes one unwise step after another, until he/she becomes caught in a trap that seems impossible to break.

RESPONSES TO ADDICTION

As a psychologist in clinical practice I have seen people struggling with addictions on countless occasions. I have also seen a range of responses to addiction in those who have become dependent. At one end of the spectrum are those like Mary. Mary knew that her compulsive behaviour was destroying her relationships and ruining her life. She had tried to quit time after time. But she seemed powerless to do so.

At the other extreme are people in complete denial, like John.

"I will stop!" he cried, as we broached the topic of his addiction.

"When do you think that will happen?" I asked.

"When everyone else stops telling me what to do!" he snapped. "I can do this on my own! I just need everyone to mind their own business."

HOW WIDESPREAD IS ADDICTION?

Substance addiction, including addiction to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, contributes significantly to the burden of disease and mortality both globally and in Australia. Statistics show that, in 2015, 18.4% (close to one in five) of the world's adult population regularly indulged in heavy episodic alcohol use, while prevalence of daily smoking was 15.2% (Peacock et al., 2018). In Australia, risky drinking was engaged in by 24.8% of the population over age 14 in 2019 (AIHW, 2020). Although daily tobacco smoking has declined from 24.3% to 11.0% since 1991, it is still the leading cause of cancer in Australia, contributing to 22% of the cancer burden (ibid). Alcohol consumption contributes to transport injuries and diseases such as cirrhosis and certain types of cancer (Peacock et al., 2018).

Gambling is one of the most well-known forms of *behaviour addiction*. It is especially prevalent in Australia (Armstrong, & Carroll, 2017). Approximately 6.8 million, or 39%, of Australian adults gamble regularly (at least once a month; *ibid*). Approximately 1.39 million, or 7.9% of the adult population, have experienced gambling-related problems, including 193,000 or 1%, who could be classed as “problem gamblers” (*ibid*). A total of \$8.6 billion dollars was spent by regular gamblers in Australia in 2015 (*ibid*).

Sex and pornography addiction is another growing problem in society. According to statistics from pornhub.com, visits to that site alone numbered 33.5 billion in 2018; that is, the equivalent of 92 million visits per day. Pornography and sex addiction hinders the development of healthy sexuality in adolescents; in adults, it distorts sexual attitudes and social realities; in

marriage, it is an unfulfilling counterfeit for real love which leads to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, separation, and divorce (Webroot, 2020).

Figures for *technology addiction* are also alarming, with many primary-aged children spending around 5 hours a day on social media, texting, gaming, watching television and movies, and video chat (Rhodes, 2017). A 2016 survey by R U OK? found that, on average, Australians spend 46 hours of their leisure time looking at screens and digital devices, by comparison with just 6 hours engaging with family and friends. Technology addiction has been linked with family conflict, lack of physical activity, and poor sleep patterns (Rhodes, 2017).

Food can become an addiction, with many people turning to comfort eating when they feel upset or stressed. Research indicates that foods high in sugar have potential to generate the

same dependency cycle as well-known drugs such as morphine and heroin (Avena, Rada, & Hoebel, 2008).

The financial and emotional rewards of work are vital to personal happiness and satisfaction. However, excessive time and energy spent working, to the detriment of family and personal health needs, may be signs of *work addiction* (Griffiths, Demetrovics, & Atroszko, 2018). Work addiction has been linked with serious health conditions, including burnout, chronic stress, psychological disorders and cardiovascular disease.

The habit of compulsive or excessive *shopping*, sometimes called oniomania, may also become an addiction (Andreassen et al., 2015). Those with problematic shopping behaviours often report specific symptoms typical of other addictions, such as cravings, withdrawals, loss of control and tolerance. Shopping addiction may be used as an escape from unpleasant

feelings such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem; ironically, however, it can also create and/or intensify these negative states of mind.

Codependency is one of the most difficult addictions to recognise because it seems the person is simply caring for others. Codependent people go to extreme lengths to earn love and respect, to the point where they neglect their own needs (Lancer, 2018).

RECOGNISING YOUR ADDICTIONS

Here are some questions to help you identify whether you may have an addiction:

1. Do you use more of the substance or engage in the behaviour more often than in the past?
2. Do you have withdrawal symptoms after using the substance or engaging in the behaviour?

3. Have you ever tried to hide, and/or lied to anyone about, your use of the substance or the extent of your behaviour?

4. Do you put this substance or behaviour ahead of other important parts of your life, such as family, work, and responsibilities?

5. Has anyone else told you that you have a problem with this behaviour or that you must stop such an activity?

6. Are you aware of any negative impacts that the substance/behaviour currently has on your relationships, finances, occupation, dreams, goals and/or other parts of your life?

7. Does the substance/behaviour make you feel good temporarily, but later cause shame, embarrassment and/or guilt?

THE BIOCHEMISTRY OF ADDICTIONS

Addictions very rarely affect only the person with the problem behaviour; they almost always exert a wide-ranging influence on all those connected with that person, especially his or her closest family members and friends. As a psychologist, I have seen many people experiencing emotional and financial distress, relationship breakdowns, and health disorders, all as a result of addiction. Yet almost all of these same people tell me, "I cannot function without it." Why is this? Why is it that people cannot break free of an addiction, even when they can see its negative consequences in their own lives?

Although there are no two cases that are identical, there does seem to be a recurring pattern in the lives of people who indulge in addictive behaviours.

For John, Mary, and millions more like them, the underlying pattern is that of discontentment with their life circumstances. Often, basic human needs are not being met adequately. In the vast majority of cases, addictions are a way of dealing with life's distresses, pressures and/or painful memories. People feel that addictions bring happiness, acceptance, or at least something that blocks their lack of contentment for a few moments.

Understanding what happens inside a person's body when he or she becomes addicted—that is, the biochemistry of addictions—can help us to understand why addictions are so hard to break (for more on this, see US HHS, pp. 2-6-2-18). It also provides a solid basis for knowing how to regain control over an addiction.

There are three main stages in the addiction cycle:

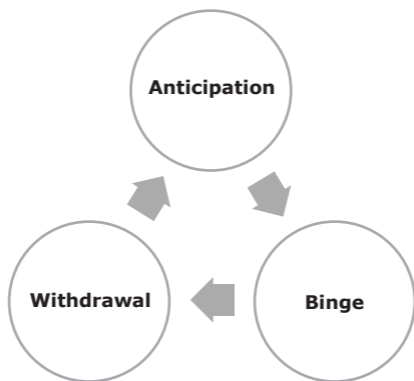


Figure 1. Stages in the addiction cycle (adapted from US HHS, 2016, p. 2-11).

Let's consider briefly what happens in each.

1. PREOCCUPATION / ANTICIPATION

In the preoccupation/anticipation stage, an individual is seeking to fulfil the natural human desire for happiness and purpose. If this is not fulfilled in

a healthful way, he/she will turn to unhealthful options. Addiction is one of the most common of these.

Think of the young child raised in an abusive home, the adolescent craving for acceptance by his peers, or the wife abandoned by her husband for a younger, more attractive woman. Think of the adult whose trauma has led him or her to seek an escape from reality. In these and hundreds more situations, an individual is left feeling vulnerable. He/she is more likely to take risks and is easily influenced to make poor decisions. This leads to Step 2: binge/intoxication.

2. BINGE/INTOXICATION

The binge/intoxication stage is the time when an individual partakes of an injurious substance, participates in a negative behaviour, or indulges in a normal behaviour, such as eating or working, to an extreme level. When a

person does this, he/she experiences a “high” due to release of a brain substance called dopamine.

Dopamine is a powerful neurochemical that plays a crucial role in the body’s motivation and reward system. It is released in the brain in response to a pleasurable experience such as when a person eats delicious food, exercises, or completes a project. It is designed to provide a balanced sense of fulfilment to motivate a person to achieve a goal (see Figure 2).

In cases of addiction, what should function as a reinforcement of healthful behaviours, is hijacked, and instead becomes a reinforcer of negative behaviours. In a desire to make him or herself feel better when he/she is down, an individual chooses to partake of an addictive substance such as alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes; or to indulge in a behaviour such as pornography, gaming, or gambling.

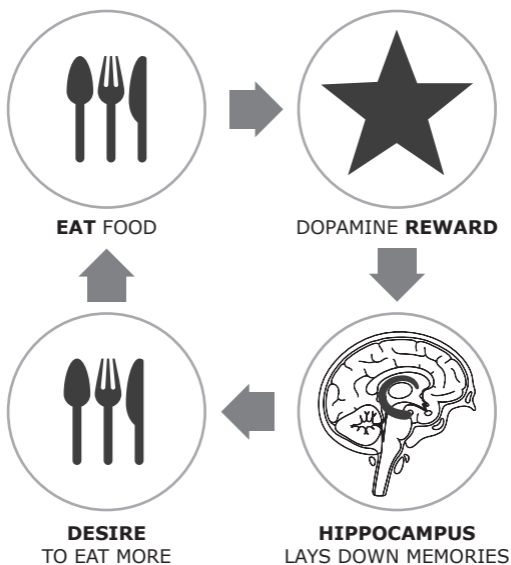


Figure 2. The dopamine reward system (Kvarnstrom, 2016).

These substances/activities stimulate a large release of dopamine, creating a “rush” or “high” at unnatural levels which the body stores as a powerful memory in the hippocampus (Figure 3).

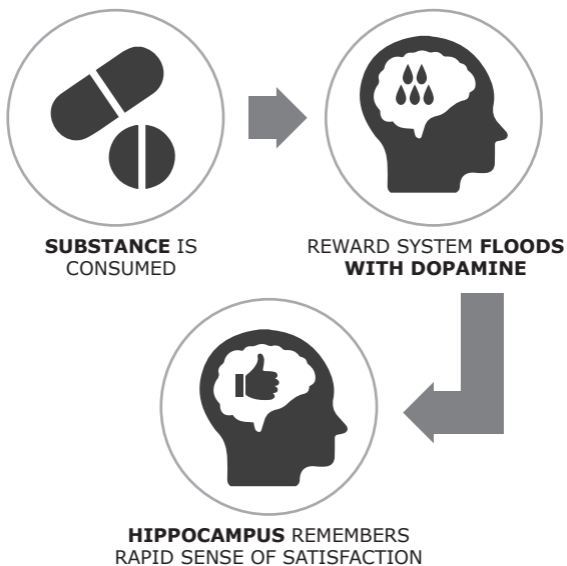


Figure 3. Brain biochemistry of addiction (Kvarnstrom, 2016).

3. WITHDRAWAL / NEGATIVE AFFECT

After partaking of an addictive substance, or being involved in addictive behaviour, an individual will experience some form of unpleasant

PREFRONTAL CORTEX

Drives user to seek out the substance

NUCLEUS ACCUMBENS

Dopamine Released

AMYGDALA

Remembers environmental cues (people, places, sights, sounds)

HIPPOCAMPUS

Remembers rapid sense of satisfaction

Environmental cues create intense cravings

withdrawal symptoms. These may be emotional (stress, anxiety, depression) and/or physical (nausea, muscle aches, cramps, etc.). This leads back to Stage 1 of the cycle: a craving for the substance in order to escape the negative effects of withdrawal.

When a person is again faced with similar environmental cues to those that led to his/her original indulgence in the substance or behaviour, the memory of the euphoric experience comes back. The desire to repeat the experience overrides any concerns over the negative consequences associated with the behaviour. As the person participates time after time, the number of brain receptors for dopamine decrease. This causes the individual to become more and more dependent on the substance or activity, a phenomenon known as tolerance (see Figure 4).

..... **DEVELOPING TOLERANCE**



Repeat
Overstimulation



Number of **Dopamine**
receptors reduced



Original dosage
gives **less**
reward

Figure 4. How tolerance develops (Kvarnstrom, 2016).

By the time the stage of tolerance is reached, it is extremely difficult to overcome an addiction. However, it is not impossible. Approximately ten years ago, scientists discovered that brain neurons are continuously forming new pathways. These neural pathways strengthen with regular use (see Figure 5). It takes time—at least 63 days—to change a habit, but it can be done (Leaf, 2019)! Through the miracle of neuroplasticity people suffering from addiction can weaken the neural connections fuelled by addictive behaviours and form new pathways that support healthful behaviours.



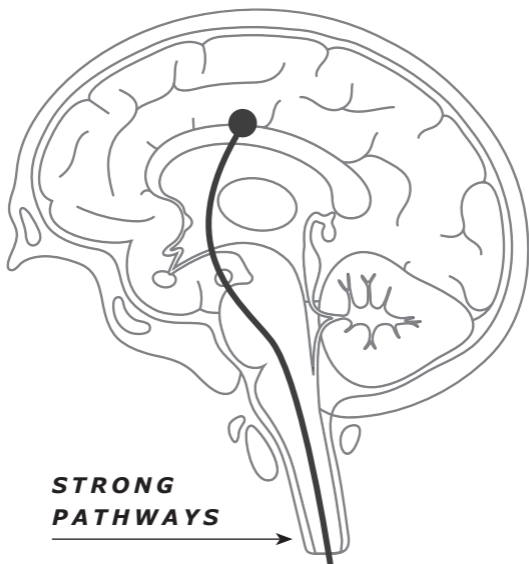
Dosage has to be increased to archive original high



Eventually, high doses are required **just to stave off withdrawals**

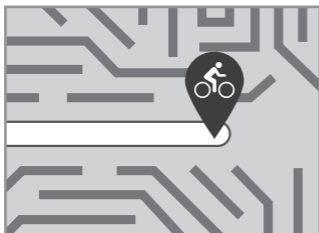
PATHWAYS

Neural pathways connect **relatively distant areas of the brain or nervous system**, each pathway is associated with a particular action or behavior

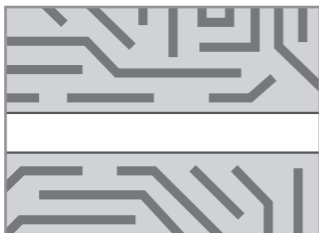


Every time we think, feel or do something **we strengthen this pathway. Habits are well travelled pathways** – our brain finds these things easy to do.

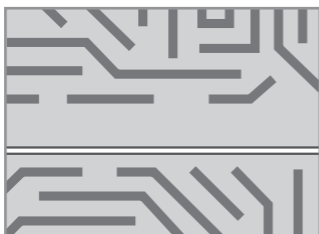
NEUROPLASTICITY



New thoughts and skills **carve out new pathways.**



Repetition and practice **strengthen these pathways,** forming new habits.



Old pathways get **used less and weaken.**

With **repeated and direct attention** towards a desired change, we all have the ability to **rewire our brains.**

A TWELVE-STEP RECOVERY PLAN

Below is a twelve-step plan for recovery from addictions that has been used successfully by literally millions of people (Adventist Recovery Ministries Global). If you're needing help to overcome an addiction, I invite you to find freedom by following this plan.

One of the most powerful tools for recovery from addiction is a journal/notebook where you can record your thoughts, observations, and progress on a daily basis. Be sure to include in this journal your responses to the "read and reflect" section of each step. Also, write down at least three things each day that you are thankful for. When life gets difficult, when the negative thoughts that lead you back to your addiction start to creep back into your mind, then take out your journal, read it and remind yourself of how far you have come.

1. Acknowledge your addiction

The first step to overcoming any addiction is to admit that you are powerless; that your life is out of control. This step is also one of the hardest to take. It is difficult for us as human beings to admit that we need help. We all want to feel that we are in control. Remember John; he did not believe that he needed help at all; he kept on telling himself that he did not have a problem. However, until an



Environmental Triggers

Places, locations, smells and sounds.



Social Triggers

Family, friends and other users.



Environmental triggers

Depression, stress, exhaustion, frustration, anger, anxiety and loneliness

Figure 6. Recognise and avoid triggers for addiction (Kvarnstrom, 2016).

individual is willing to face the problem, it will never be addressed.

Read and reflect:

- Romans 7:18
- *Steps to Christ**, Chapters 1 and 2: "God's Love for Man" and "The Sinner's Need of Christ"

2. Choose to believe that a Power greater than yourself can restore you to sanity.

When you have admitted your need of help, the next step is to believe that there is a divine Being who can help you. There are many ideas about God in the world today, but the Bible tells us that God is love; that He loves and values human beings so much that He sent Jesus Christ, the second Person of the eternal Godhead, to take the penalty of sin for every individual (John 3:16). The Bible also tells us that God is all-

* See page 44 for details on where to purchase 'Steps to Christ'

powerful (Jeremiah 32:17,27; Matthew 28:18). John 8:36 says, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." This tells us that God, through His Son Jesus Christ, has the power to set you free from addiction.

You may not know much about God, but He loves you and longs to help you (Jeremiah 31:3; Isaiah 41:10). By choosing to believe this, you will ally yourself with a Power greater than your own, a Power that will give you the strength you need to overcome addiction.

Read and reflect:

- Isaiah 41:10
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 3: "Repentance"

3. Give your will to God

The secret to overcoming addiction by God's power lies in giving Him your will and allowing Him to fight the battle for you. "For the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15). God has the power to free you from addiction, but He needs your permission to use His power on your behalf. You can give Him that permission by praying a simple prayer like this: Dear God, today I have learned that true happiness and value can only be found in knowing and following You, the God who made me and loves me. Show me more of who You are. I give You my will today and ask for Your power to overcome my addiction to [name your addiction]. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Read and reflect:

- Luke 9:23
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 4: "Confession"

4. Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself.

Divide a new page in your journal into two columns. At the top of the right column, write the title, "Who I want to be". In this column, make a list of realistic goals for your health, relationships, career and self-worth. At the top of the left column, write the title, "Who I am today". In this column, write how your addiction has negatively impacted your health, relationships, career and self-worth. This comparative list will become your why: your motivation to continue the positive changes in your life even when things get tough. Mark this page and revisit it daily.

Read and reflect:

- Lamentations 3:40
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 4: "Confession"

5. Admit to God, to yourself and to another human being the exact nature of your wrongs.

In Step 1, you admitted your need of help. Step 5 adds a new dimension to this: it asks you to state exactly what your addiction is. Confess this your addiction aloud to God in prayer. By doing this, you will also be admitting your failures to yourself.

Through prayer and Bible study, you have instant, direct access to God and His divine power. However, God also works through indirect means. One of the most powerful ways that God helps us is through other people. After you have surrendered your addiction fully to God, be open to the help He sends through counselling professionals, an accountability partner, and a social support network.

If you have tried to stop your addiction before without much success, and your

addiction is related to some traumatic experience that has entrapped you for a long time, you will almost certainly need professional help. A counsellor, therapist or psychologist can help you discover the root cause behind your drive for the addictive substance or behaviour, deal with it, and find a new pathway forward. Cognitive-behavioural therapy has been found to be highly effective in helping people to overcome addiction by recognising negative thought patterns and reprogramming the brain for success (Figures 5 and 6). When choosing a therapist or counsellor to help you overcome your addiction, look for a person who is neutral to you and free from bias.

It is important to seek out positive environments where people will support you in your decision to quit your addiction. You may want to attend a local support group that is specifically related to your addiction, or a health

club or health program where positive and practical healthy habits are shared and encouraged. Various community organisations and churches often run such programs for free or at a very low cost.

Read and reflect:

- James 5:16
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 4: "Confession"

6. Be entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

It is one thing to admit that you have done wrong by indulging in a substance or behaviour that has harmed yourself and others. However, you must also be willing to stop doing those wrong things. A powerful way to do this is to keep God's love and plan for your life in mind. When you feel tempted to continue your addictive behaviour, remind yourself of

the pain it has already brought, and will continue to bring, to you, to others and to God. Think about the fact that Jesus suffered in your place, taking the punishment that you deserve (Isaiah 53:5). Ask God to keep these thoughts fresh in your mind, so that you will come to hate your addiction, and be fully committed to eradicating it completely from your life.

Read and reflect:

- Isaiah 1:19
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 5: "Consecration"

7. Humbly ask God to remove all your shortcomings.

When you have confessed your wrongs, and are ready to make a change in your life, ask God for the power to quit. Then, believe that God will set you free because He has promised to do so.

Show your faith in God's power by acting immediately to get rid of any addictive substances or materials that support your habit. Throw away the cigarettes; dispose of the alcohol; block your internet; clean out your cupboards; delete the material you read, watch, listen to, or play with. This may feel intense, but to great problems, there must be great measures.

Make a resolution to not engage in this addictive behaviour for today, and today only. Repeat this tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Make overcoming your addiction your daily focus on your journey to recovery. Repeat to yourself this Bible promise: "Casting all your cares (worries) upon Him (God), because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Be sure to check in daily with an accountability partner, someone you can be open and honest with. Ask that person to be there for you as you take

this important step.

As you leave behind addictive behaviors, it is vital to replace them with positive habits. The Bible says, "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"(Romans 12:21).

When the urge for the addiction comes on, go for a walk around the block, take a shower, or simply do something positive to distract yourself from your craving for the addictive substance or behavior. Claim Bible promises as you walk or shower. The cravings will pass and soon lose their hold on you.

Read, watch, and reflect:

- James 4:10
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 6: "Faith and Acceptance"
- *Live More Happy: Scientifically Proven Ways to Lift Your Mood and Your Life* by Dr Darren Morton

- *Depression: The Way Out* by Dr Neil Nedley
- "Top 10 Brain Optimizers" by Dr Neil Nedley (FREE download from The Incredible Journey website tij.tv).
- *8 principles to achieve optimum mental health* by Dr Daniel Banos (TEDx Talk available on YouTube).

8. Make a list of all those you have harmed, and be willing to make amends to them.

Using addictive substances and engaging in addictive behaviours not only hurts you; it almost always hurts others too. A true change of heart will be shown by a willingness to make wrongs right, as far as possible. In addictions, behaviours and words often do not match. When you make the decision to quit, it is important to show others that your life has changed; that you have chosen to stop doing

wrong, and started to do right. Making amends often means more than just an apology. For example, if you have stolen something, making amends means not only apologising, but also giving back what you took.

Read and reflect:

- Matthew 5:23
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 7: "The Test of Discipleship"

9. Make direct amends to all people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

After you have made a list of all those you have harmed, go to the people on your list, and make amends. This is best done in person, and is then called making direct amends. There may be instances, however, where it is not possible or best to make direct amends.

For instance, if making amends will take you into an environment where you are likely to be tempted by your addictive behaviour, it is not wise to go there. Your primary priority must be to safeguard your own recovery. Also, if a person says he/she does not wish to meet with you, you need not feel that you must force them to do so. Remember to allow that individual the same free choice that God allows you.

Read and reflect:

- Luke 6:38
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 8: "Growing up into Christ"

10. Continue to take a personal inventory on a daily basis, and promptly admit each time you do wrong.

As you begin a new life, you will have victories, but almost inevitably there will

be some hard days and defeats. During those times, do not give in to despair. Continue to monitor your progress, and each time you fall into temptation, confess your wrong immediately to God and, where appropriate, to others. Remember, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand" (Psalm 37:23,24).

Read and reflect:

- Romans 12:3
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 9: "The Work and the Life"

11. Seek to improve your conscious contact with God through prayer and reflection.

While on this earth, Jesus overcame severe temptations by relying on the

Word of God. By studying the Bible and praying for God's help to obey it, you can make an entire, lasting change in your life, and quit your addiction for good. Look for Bible promises and think about how each one of these applies to your life. Recognise that these are God's words of power and freedom to you personally. Some of my favourite Bible verses are, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57); and, "For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'" (Isaiah 41:13).

Read and reflect:

- Psalm 19:14
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapters 10, 11 and 12: "A Knowledge of God", "The Privilege of Prayer," and "What to do with Doubt."

12. Use your personal experience from the above steps as the basis for reaching out to help others in need.

The final step in recovery from addiction is to help others who are now struggling with the same temptations you have overcome. As you help others to do this, it will reinforce your own decision to quit and will give you a new sense of purpose and self-worth in life. By reaching out to others, you will gain the greatest blessing of all!

Read and reflect:

- Galatians 6:1
- *Steps to Christ*, Chapter 13: "Rejoicing in the Lord"

At first, addictive substances and behaviours look appealing and feel exciting. They seem to offer a sense of euphoria that can lift an individual out of perplexing or depressing

circumstances. However, addictions always end in emptiness, heartache, and brokenness. You were created for so much more than this.

Addiction does not have to define who you are. You were made for a high and noble purpose. God, your Creator, loves and cares for you, no matter how broken you are feeling right now (Jeremiah 31:3; 1 Peter 5:7). He wants you to experience an abundant, fulfilling life. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV). It is my prayer that the steps in this booklet will empower you to experience the wonderful life that God has planned for you.

Where to get help

Support services for overcoming addictions are available in many countries around the world. The best first contact is your local doctor. In Australia, the following organisations all provide services to help you overcome addiction.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation

1300 85 85 84

The Family Drug Helpline

1300 660 068.

Family Drug Support Australia

1300 368 186.

Alcoholics Anonymous

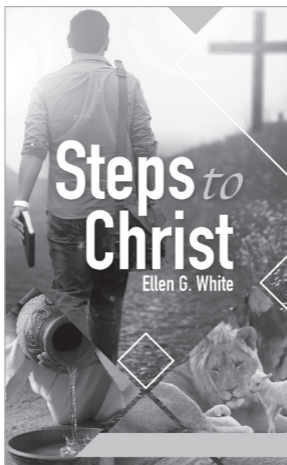
1300 222 222.

Lifeline 13 11 14.

ReachOut.com has information about addiction and mental health for young people.

The book **Steps to Christ**, by Ellen G. White is available through our TIJ store:

tijstore.tv/books



Have you ever wondered, *What is God like? Does He care about me? Can I have a personal relationship with Him?* This little book *Steps to Christ* answers these questions in simple, practical ways. It explains how God is Love, and how evil entered our world. It points us to Jesus, who came to live on Earth as a human being, to show us the true character of God.

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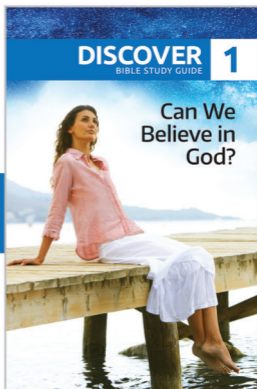
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As humans, each one of us has an inbuilt desire to find happiness and fulfilment in life. Tragically, however, what is intended to be a great blessing has, in a vast number of lives today, become one of the greatest curses. Addiction hijacks inbuilt body systems meant for good, turning these to perverted uses with heart-breaking consequences that affect many lives.



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