

# Freedom From Habits

If you've faithfully tried walk in victory as a Christian but feel like a failure, consider the force of ruts. If the power of the Holy Spirit seems beyond your reach, even though you have sincerely sought for it, suspect the subtlety of ruts. You are probably coming to a showdown with “Habit Patterns,” one of the meanest hombres in the West!

In Romans 7:20 Paul states that because he did not want to do what he was doing, it wasn't him doing it. This wasn't double-talk. It's true. When we do what we don't want to do, then something else is exerting pressure upon us — at first. As Ephesians 6:12 explains, the origin of our troubles is from the foe. But, here's the problem:

**Once we've developed a habit pattern in our life by repeatedly obeying the enemy, we are his servant.**

*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

*Romans 6:16*

We can fool ourselves into thinking we're an abused victim, but repeated failure digs a rut! The mind's ability to perform a function without conscious effort is tapped by our adversary and used against us! This ability of humans is great when it comes to driving cars and doing a host of other routine jobs. It's a dangerously different matter when our “routine” skills include complaining, doubting, lusting, drinking, fighting, lying, etc. Binding and loosing may not yield much success if the instigator is long gone, and “we” are the culprit!

When a habit is formed by obeying the enemy's repetitive suggestions, the tempter is no longer required. Who is at fault? We are. Where did the temptation come from? Initially, Satan, but our continued obedience

produces a bondage, slavery. Who gets into trouble? We do. How do we break the bondage, chase away the enemy? It's probably too late for that. No, we must do something with the rut!

## **RUTS**

We know that ruts are formed in dirt roads by constant traffic. Even asphalt streets get ruts when used excessively. In our lives, we tend to repeat old patterns, **especially if they seem to work**. Before very long we have a habit that we can do without consciously thinking. This capacity of the mind is great if we're running certain machinery, but it's a killer when we're dealing with stinkin' thinkin'. If it's "second nature" for us to doubt, fear, cuss, hit, etc., the enemy can use this otherwise productive aspect of our mind to destroy us!

Ruts have great power over us because they become our "reflex" or first response. We do them without stopping to think, and, therefore, our enemy has only to flash a picture across our mind (conscious or subconscious), and we take it from there! If the rut was encouraged by an evil spirit, then the spirit becomes a source of pressure that keeps us in the rut. The spirit may have an easy job, and only stirs when we try to shake ourselves free.

We know that demons can't trap us unless they trick us into using our will against ourselves. I don't believe they can snare us by just an occasional oversight on our part. However, when we have obeyed their impulses and temptations over a period of time, we find ourselves in a rut with the evil spirit as our taskmaster. We may want to get out of the rut, but find it virtually impossible. We may go forward for prayer in special meetings and find some relief for a season, but soon the old rut returns.

I believe there are four very important things we must do to get out and stay out of deadly ruts:

### **1. SAY "STOP"**

At the first sign of stinkin' thinkin' you have a choice. This is when it will be the easiest to change directions. An old adage is that it's harder to gather the chickens after they get loose! So, when you first notice the rut response starting, say loudly in your mind, **"STOP!"**

When you come to a fork in the road at full speed, you'll end up going the way you've always gone. You need to come to a complete stop and **think!** When you first feel yourself getting angry, say “**STOP**” in your mind. When old depression thoughts start to roll in, just say “**STOP.**”

## **2. MAKE A CHOICE!**

You do not have to continue living the same old way. How could God hold us responsible for changing if we “can't help it”? We can choose a different response. God puts before us life and death and asks us to make the choice for life (Deuteronomy 30:19,20)! But, **the biggest problem with ruts is that you can do the wrong thing without even thinking!**

See the end result of the wrong action. See the benefits of doing what is right, what you really want to do! **Then make your decision for the new way, the best way, the way of life.** Say this decision to yourself over and over until the power of repetition begins to create a new mind in you!

As an example, let's say your rut of stinkin' thinkin' has to do with feeling like a failure and that things are never going to get any better. When you sense the failure feelings starting to rise, say **stop**, then picture where the path of failure thinking will take you...right to a junk pile. Picture yourself walking down the path of LIFE with Jesus, hand in hand! Choose the path of Life! Say over and over, “Jesus, I choose to walk the Path of Life with You! You are leading me in success and abundance. Things are getting better and better!”

Memorize a couple of verses like Psalm 35:27 or Psalm 36:7-9. Say them over and over to yourself! **Instead of allowing the enemy to use the power of repetition to beat you down, use it to create Life — abundant life!**

You will probably have to say your positive response out loud as well as in your mind. I'm convinced that the recordings that go over and over in our mind are where the greatest power exists! So, get new recordings! The deeper the rut, the more work it will take to make a new one; but, whatever the effort required, it will be worth it!

One person told me how effective it was for them to jump in their car and go for a ride and yell at the top of their lungs at the devil. They were intensifying this principle of making a choice. When they yelled, they were

convincing themselves as well as the enemy! The bottom line was that it broke the enemy's grip! I say, Hallelujah, whatever it takes! Let's win.

### 3. SEND SOMEBODY TO JAIL!

I discuss this matter in great detail in my book *Winning the Inner War* (from which this chapter has been taken). See chapters two and three. Resist the force that is trying to keep you in the rut. Put a name on it. What is the rut? Set the name of the rut up as a target, and shoot at it with your weaponry! Use the name of Jesus to bind it and then send it packing to the abyss!

“Rut (or spirit) of negative thinking, I demand you leave me right now in the name of Jesus!”

Or...

“Spirit of lust I bind you in Jesus' name. You will not lure me into your filth.”

Lock up the critters in the abyss! The main point is that we will need to get the “unseen” pressure off our back if we are to win the scrimmage. The enemy pounds hard against our mind to trick us into using our will for his ends. Don't fall for it! **Resist the pressure to sin as though it were from a real person—it is!**

### 4. DO SOMETHING NEW

New, Spirit-given ruts are what we want! Wouldn't it be great if it was second nature for you to have loving, faith responses to problems instead of blowing up? It can happen, but it will require making new habits! What I'm trying to say with step four is that we can't merely stop doing negative things. **We must start doing new, positive things or we'll slip back into the old ruts.**

How about an example of using these four steps? Let's say you feel a wave of depression coming over you. First, say **STOP**. Secondly, see in your mind a negative picture of the probable consequences from acting on the depression. Contrast that picture with one of you being successful in repulsing the temptation. Make the decision to not accept the negative rut.

Speak your decision out loud. Thirdly, bind the spirit that put the pressure on you (thoughts and emotions), and send him packing. Fourthly, begin praising God for the victory, the new life, the abundance He's giving you. Put some positive faith responses to work in your mind. This is when it's valuable to have some memory verse cards close by. Pull one out and focus on what God has said!

If the rut-pressure is to think something judgmental toward someone, then a good, new response would be to bless them instead!

### **THE PRICE**

Victory has a price. It would be nice if we could have someone say a little prayer for us and then be on our way and never have to fight the devil again. But, alas, it doesn't work that way. That would be heaven! This is the schoolroom called life, and it comes fully equipped with exciting tests and opportunities for growth!

You may drive into a ditch that is too close to the road, and a tow truck can pull you out. If, however, something isn't done with the ditch and your driving doesn't improve, you'll probably soon be back in the ditch. We must learn how to drive in the Spirit to avoid the ditches, and then pay the price to get the ditches filled up.

The Bible is full of instructions on how to “drive” properly, such as “flee youthful lusts,” “don't let the sun go down on your wrath,” etc. As you are reading along in the Word, some of these might jump out at you. If they do, don't argue with the Lord, telling Him how that's not a problem with you. Who do you think made it jump out at you? Prayerfully consider such verses, and whisper a prayer like, “Lord Jesus, show me how to incorporate this truth in my life to a greater degree.”

When I took Judo as a teenager, our teacher drilled us for months on how to fall properly. In Judo, especially when you're first learning, you spend a lot of time flying through the air and landing in a pile. The teacher's goal was for us to automatically land in such a way that we would minimize getting hurt. After months of slapping the mats, I knew how to land — automatically!

The price I paid to learn how to take a fall paid big dividends. Not only did I escape injury during two years of Judo, but one day it saved my back. I fell from a rafter when I was goofing off at camp — straight down on my

back, on a wood floor. Without even thinking, I slapped the floor as though it were a Judo mat. I broke the fall and, I believe, saved my back from serious injury. The moral to this story: **When you pay a price to discipline yourself for godliness, you will automatically do the right thing at the right time!** And it can save more than your physical body!

## **RUT DETECTORS**

How can we tell if we are in serious ruts? It may not be as obvious as you think to determine if you have been tricked by an enemy spirit into a destructive habit pattern. Some of these ruts hide behind family traits, nationality quirks and survival devices. For instance, you have heard people blame their hot temper on their Irish lineage or their red hair or that they were just like their father. What they're saying is that they can't be expected to change, after all, it's not their fault! If you find yourself doing something your parents used to do that drove you crazy, you probably adopted one of their ruts without even realizing it!

We are responsible for our own actions and reactions. Sometimes we might be heard to say, "Well, that's just my personality. That's just the way I am." We don't get out of ruts by blaming someone else or excusing away our shortcomings. **Growth is a personal response.** People can nag us to change, and we can wish that change would come, but lasting growth is only possible when we make a firm resolve to change and then take whatever steps are necessary to walk out the change.

How does the enemy figure into breaking habit patterns? Picture a man trying to climb out of a ditch, but he has a heavy pack on his back. You say to him, "Hey, why don't you climb out of the ditch?" He answers, "I really want to, but I have this heavy pack on my back and I don't have the strength to get out." We may think he is silly for not casting the pack off his back and scampering out of the ditch, but **he has come to believe that the pack is a necessity for his life.** Spirits work like the pack on the back. They can convince us that they are absolutely essential for our life.

Behind the ruts and behind the spirits there is the truth that bad behavior starts in the mind! You may not agree with this next statement, but I feel that even habits such as smoking are not as much a physical addiction to nicotine as they are a destructive rut in the thinking processes.

When someone makes up their mind to quit smoking, a battle starts. It's not a physical battle as much as it is the mind being bombarded by thoughts from the spirit behind the rut of smoking. Sure, chemical reactions can cause discomfort for a while as the physical body adapts to the absence of nicotine, but this passes in a short time. For a long-term smoker, the battle lasts much longer than the chemical readjustment. There's something more going on. A little voice says, "Man, wouldn't a smoke go good right now?" Your mind (thinking it was your own thought) answers back, "Yes, but I just quit." If there were no pressure from outside sources at this point, you would change the subject and be on about your business. But there is a spirit behind the rut of smoking—Mr. Nicotine, Esq. A royal battle ensues. The spirit tells you that you need something to calm your nerves. It says you are going to eat yourself to death if you don't start smoking again, etc. And, the worst part of all, the little imp reminds you how great it was to have a cigarette and a cup of coffee. These stinkers seem to know just what memory to recall to try to talk us back into the rut!

If the person seeking to break a bad habit is ignorant of the forces involved in the inner war, he's going to have a rough time walking in victory. But, if he sees what's going on, fights the real (spiritual) battle and then fills up the rut with new actions, victory is near! I've talked to people who won the fight for freedom from habits, and the way they know the victory is complete is when there's not the slightest tug toward the old response. This takes determined effort, but it's worth it.

I used smoking as an example because many of us have fought furiously to quit smoking, or know someone who has, only to lose the battle. I believe that something like this scenario is working behind every destructive habit, from cussing to pornography to temper flare-ups to charge-mania to phobias and depression.

## **TRAPDOORS**

Ruts started somewhere, and if we can determine when and how they started, we are more liable to keep from falling back into the trap or into a parallel trap. Ruts don't "just happen." For something like smoking, a poke into the past may reveal a teenager who was determined to be liked by the crowd and thus began the "in" habit. Maybe it was a desire to be "macho" or

cool. If the acquisition of the habit was to spite someone, then a spirit of rebellion might be connected with keeping us in the rut.

Someone told me that he would have quit smoking sooner if people hadn't bugged him about quitting—sounds like a spirit of pride was involved!

Another trapdoor can be overeating because of being raised in poverty. A panic spirit subconsciously suggests that we'd better eat everything in sight because this may be the last of the food!

I know that some women were harassed or abused when they were slim and trim, so they decided to protect themselves inside large castle walls (poor pun). These self-protective thoughts make a bit of sense, but they are a replacement for dependence upon the Living God! They are actually an idol, a substitute for the faith that the Lord will supply their needs, and fight for them!

Ask the Holy Spirit, “Where did this rut begin?” And then seek His guidance if there might be some alien mischief-makers helping you to stay in the rut. You probably won't hear an audible voice, but He will more than likely, within a few days, bring to your mind where it all began.

The trapdoor for depression is usually tied into losing hope. We want to have a handle on life, yet we feel helplessly out of control. We can get into the rut of listening to a spirit of depression sing a woeful tale of how bad things are, how misunderstood we are, or that the future is hopeless.

A controlling spirit tries to get us to control as much of life as we can. When we can't control our circumstances or the people around us, we can slip into depression or anger. But, depression is not always caused by these things. Sometimes it is caused by hormone imbalance (monthly cycles, etc.) or other physical problems; however, by far, most depression ruts are from stinkin' thinkin'.

There is no way we can discuss all the trap doors that lead to ruts. But, you're probably intelligent enough to find the trapdoors that need correcting. Besides, you have the Holy Spirit, Who, by the way, is more concerned about this than you are. Seek His guidance.

Monitor your thinking patterns for a while. Look for thoughts with a *false promise*. A spirit of lying promises to get us out of trouble and supply whatever we need. The power behind a macho image likewise promises great things but never comes through. A spirit of failure may promise the perfect excuse—“You can't expect me to succeed.”

The spirit that suggests we throw a temper tantrum gives the idea that acting crazy provides power. This can be carried over into adulthood and produce a monster. These ruts of unsuitable behaviors resulted from continual repetition of wrong actions because **we somehow saw the benefits as greater than any consequences**. We may have thought to ourself, “I really shouldn't act this way, but so what, it works, doesn't it?”

If an adult has a rut of throwing temper tantrums that are a carryover from childhood, the only lasting solution must start with a surrender of one's whole life to the Lordship of Jesus. A new thinking rut needs to be implemented: “Jesus, I don't want things to go my way; please let them go Your way!” This kind of phrase, running through your mind, develops a new rut, one with unlimited power.

The temper tantrum response is selfish; this new rut of turning control of your life over to Jesus by an act of your will is selfless. One produces life, the other produces death!

Sometimes a friend can help us determine how we got into a particular rut and what the power is behind the rut. Other people can usually be more objective about our problems than we can. Be careful who you choose to talk to if you are dealing with a sensitive or embarrassing area. Not everyone can keep things quiet!

Try to think back to when you first noticed the problem becoming a pattern. If you find the start of a rut, you'll probably find something that you need to confess and repent of before the Lord.

As an example, let's say you trace a rut of fear back to a time when you were scared as a child. You were walking home in the dark and your bully brother jumped out of the bushes and scared you silly. In the moments following the incident, as you collected your senses, anger probably arose, and blended in with the fear. As similar events occurred, a spirit of fear started helping you out by warning you in advance of when and where you might get scared by bully brother or perhaps something even more dangerous. It made sense to consider the advance warnings, after all, it's better to be scared only a little bit rather than the mega dose you first experienced.

Somewhere along life's path, “Fear, the helper” turned into “Fear, a taskmaster,” a rut in which you are trapped. The Scriptural way to prevent such a rut from developing in the first place is to take every situation captive

to Christ. You would have had to forgive your nasty brother and then reaffirm that the Lord is your constant Shepherd and friend and that He would always protect you. Such a biblical response to a scary experience prevents a spirit from taking advantage of your vulnerability. Then, filling your mind with positive thoughts, such as are found in the Bible, makes the perfect rut fill-er-upper.

There may not be a spirit behind the negative ruts in our lives, but because Ephesians 6:12 specifically tells us that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, the truth is that the enemy is probably involved to one degree or another! Our opponent, according to God, is extraterrestrial — demonic powers of the dark spheres! Fight the wrong enemy and you get nowhere; fight the right enemy and you win!

We're not told to just submit to God, but to also resist the devil (James 4:7). I've gotten the impression from some believers that they only want to do the positive aspect of James 4:7 and pretend that if they ignore the adversary he'll go away. Not so!

You may want to send for the book *Winning the Inner War* at the address below. God bless you as you seek to be all that the Lord Jesus wants you to be!

Please send me your comments and insights:

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