

# BREAKING BAD HABITS

A **MANNAHOUSE** RESOURCE



# INTRODUCTION

**Life is filled with habits - some good, some not so good.** We are creatures of habit. We've all managed to acquire a host of habits in the course of our development.

Many habits are innocent, unnoticeable, and of little consequence. However, some habits are deadly, obvious, and of major consequence to our lives.

When we embraced Christ, we renounced a life of sinful habits and practices. But **many Christians find it difficult to break old habits and forsake well-established patterns.** In this booklet, we will examine the subject of breaking bad habits, and offer some liberating steps for accomplishing this.

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## WHAT IS A HABIT?

A habit is “an established practice, tendency, or manner of behavior.” **It is a behavioral pattern which is acquired through frequent repetition.**

A habit implies something which we have learned to do unconsciously and often compulsively. It is a life pattern which has been reinforced through repeated use.

A habit can be harmless, or life-threatening. It can range from a facial mannerism, to something as deeply ingrained as a character weakness. It can involve something as simple as putting the right shoe on first, to something as serious as drug addiction.

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE HABITS?

Habits can be extremely important. They often have a tremendous impact upon the course of our lives. **They can even affect our eternal destiny.** The following saying captures this truth well:

**Sow a thought, reap a deed;  
Sow a deed, reap a HABIT;  
Sow a HABIT, reap a personality;  
Sow a personality, reap a destiny.**

Since our habits can have such a significant impact upon our lives, we must not ignore them or take them lightly. Those habits which are beneficial need to be appreciated and reinforced. Those habits which are detrimental need to be carefully examined and eliminated.

## THE CHALLENGE OF CONQUERING HABITS

The challenge of overcoming destructive habits can be a formidable obstacle. **Some habits are so firmly established in our lives that they seem like insurmountable barriers.**

Habits sometimes appear to be areas which are impossible to change. The prophet Jeremiah presented a question which appropriately characterizes the dilemma which we sometimes encounter when confronting the challenge of breaking bad habits:

*“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil”*  
(Jeremiah 13:23, NIV).

## A SOURCE OF FRUSTRATION

The struggle of wrestling with habits can often produce a deep sense of frustration.

The difficulty of achieving a permanent victory over alcoholism, drug dependence, and smoking can become a grueling experience.

**Our previous inability to defeat sinful habits can create an overwhelming sense of hopelessness and despair.**

Those who have sought to overcome such habits have soon discovered that they are not always easy to defeat. It is not a problem which can be solved with simplistic answers or quick-fix remedies. However, **it is a problem which can be successfully answered through Christ.**

## IS THERE GENUINE HOPE?

**Yes!** Before we can successfully deal with sinful habits, we must understand that **there are no hopeless situations in Christ. Our habits are no exception.**

In I Corinthians 6:9-10, **Paul lists** the sinful practices which the Corinthians had been habitually involved in. He included such things as **drunkenness, sexual sin, and thievery.**

In verse eleven, he followed with this important statement: **"And such WERE SOME OF YOU."** This verse is a strong encouragement for all those seeking a lasting release from life-dominating habits. The wording is in the past tense - "WERE". **Paul reveals that God has made it possible to overcome what seems to be impossible - our old ways.** Jesus didn't just provide a temporary, half-way solution. He gives a permanent victory over every conceivable practice. If He could do it for them, He can do the same for us!



## IS THERE A SOLUTION?

**Absolutely!** This is the guarantee of scripture: “**I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST** *who strengthens me*” (Phil. 4:13). However, some Christians have convinced themselves that this is not possible.

They have made so many unsuccessful attempts to overcome their habits that they have resigned themselves to failure. They have defeated themselves even before they begin.

We may have lost a few battles, but we have not lost the war. In spite of our previous failures, we must not settle for total defeat. **We must recommit ourselves to follow God’s divine instructions for victory.** On the following pages, we will examine the scriptural steps for achieving a complete and permanent victory over our sinful habits.

# 1. WE MUST SINCERELY REPENT

***“IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”***  
(I John 1:9). Sincere repentance is the first step.

Before any Christian can defeat sinful habits, he **must recognize them as a sinful practice**. If we fail to grasp this fundamental fact, we will not succeed in overcoming them.

We must not endeavor to conquer our sinful habits just to alleviate guilt or sooth a troubled conscience. Our motive must not be based upon the compulsion or coaxing of others only. It must be based upon a sincere, godly conviction to please God and appropriate His cleansing power and forgiveness.

## 2. WE MUST APPROPRIATE GOD'S POWER

**Before we can bring God's power to bear upon the problem, we must recognize that we have a problem.** If we ignore it, minimize it, or overlook it, our sinful habit will only reinforce itself.

We must identify the habit and give careful consideration to its nature, frequency, and occurrences. When we have given proper attention to the problem area, we can begin to wage successful warfare against it.

**After isolating the problem, we should begin to attack it through persistent prayer.** If we will begin to draw upon the power of Christ through prayer, He will impart the necessary strength. We must not rely upon our own might, but upon the divine resources of the Holy Spirit to combat our sinful habits.

### 3. WE MUST STRIVE FOR CHANGE

The scriptures teach us that change is a vital part of our development in Christ (II Cor. 3:18). The process of change is a fundamental requirement for overcoming sinful habits.

**Without change, our habits will continue to persist.** However, change must be more than just attempting to stop practicing a sinful habit. Many attempt this form of change without lasting success.

**Change must involve more than saying "NO!"** Change isn't just a matter of willpower, human resolve, or sheer determination. It isn't turning over a new leaf or making bold promises to quit. **Quitting is not change. This is only a half-way response which only provides half-way results.** If this is all we do to change, our change will only be temporary.

**Scriptural change involves a two-fold process: Real change isn't just stopping sinful habits, but replacing them with godly actions.** Only when we begin to change our practices and relearn positive habits can we really achieve lasting victory.

Paul points out this two-fold process in Colossians 3:8. He exhorts us to **"put off" our old practices**. He then encourages us to **"put on the new man"** (Col. 3:10).

This putting "off" is the negative side of change. This is important, but in itself, insufficient. We must also apply **the positive side of change** which **involves the putting "on" of biblical alternatives**. This is the key to successful change.

We must begin to restructure our lives according to the Word of God. We must change in the right direction.

## 4. BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

“And **do not be drunk with wine**, in which is dissipation; **BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT**” (Eph. 5: 18). This verse illustrates both the positive and negative side of change.

Instead of allowing ourselves to be dominated by old habits, we should strive for the Holy Spirit to be the prevailing influence in our lives on a daily basis. **When we are filled with His presence, we receive the necessary strength, support, and will power to successfully overcome the “lust of the flesh”** (Gal. 5:16, 17, KJV).

We must replace our old habits with constructive alternatives. Paul reveals some of the practical steps for accomplishing this in verses 19 and 20 of Ephesians, chapter 5.

## 5. APPLY THE CLEANSING POWER OF THE WORD

**“How can a young man cleanse his way? BY TAKING HEED ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD”** (Psalms 119:9). The Word provides an effective source of cleansing for our old ways.

In referring to God’s desire for His church, Paul stated: “*That He might sanctify and CLEANSE IT WITH THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD*” (Eph. 5 :26). **The Word is a cleansing agent for our thoughts, desires, and inclinations.**

We should carefully consider those scriptural passages which have a specific bearing upon the need for godly change and His provision for help. If we will meditate upon God’s Word and take heed to His counsel, it will gradually begin the process of cleansing our ways and purifying our habits.

## 6. WE MUST BRING OUR HABITS UNDER SUBJECTION

*“But I DISCIPLINE MY BODY AND BRING IT INTO SUBJECTION, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27).*

We must exercise a firm hand in disciplining our sinful habits. The tendency to participate with our old ways must be confronted and suppressed. **If we allow our minds to fantasize, flirt with, or entertain the possible justification of our sinful habits, we will suffer defeat.**

Victory depends upon decisive action. **When we are tempted to continue a sinful habit, we must challenge the desire with the Word of God.** The temptation should also serve as a warning signal to drive us to the Lord in prayer. Our determination to promptly confront our habits when they arise is an effective safeguard against failure.



## 7. WE MUST FORM RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

The scriptures reveal the destructive power of wrong relationships: **“DO NOT BE MISLED: BAD COMPANY CORRUPTS GOOD CHARACTER”** (I Cor. 15:33, NIV). Harmful relationships only reinforce sinful habits (Prov. 22:24, 25).

**Old friendships and associates can be a destructive influence.** Our old hangouts can also create compromising situations for those endeavoring to overcome sinful habits.

This fact demands a godly alternative. **We must terminate those associations which hinder us and surround ourselves with healthy relationships which reinforce godliness.** We must strengthen the ties of Christian fellowship and center our activities around the church (Heb. 10:24, 25).

## 8. WE MUST NOT GIVE UP!

**"A JUST MAN FALLETH SEVEN TIMES, AND RISETH UP AGAIN"**  
(Prov. 24:16, KJV). In the process of striving for victory, **we may occasionally fall short; however, we must rise up and continue to press on.**

We must persevere in order to achieve victory. We must not allow our failures to discourage, frustrate, or disillusion us. They must not cause us to give up. **It takes time to re-establish godly alternatives. There is no such thing as instant success.** It takes about 30 days to relearn a godly habit. Therefore, persistence and determination are essential.

We must **never entertain a spirit of quitting or defeat.** We must press on in the confidence that we "**CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST** who strengthens us" (Phil. 4: 13).

## CONCLUSION

**We must recognize that a lasting victory over sinful habits is guaranteed in Christ.** We are not hopelessly bound to them. Change is possible if we will diligently apply the steps covered in this booklet:

1. We must sincerely **repent**.
2. We must **appropriate God's power**.
3. We must **strive for change**.
4. **"Be filled with the Spirit."**
5. **Apply** the cleansing power of **the Word**.
6. We must **bring our habits under subjection**.
7. We must **form right relationships**.
8. We **must not give up**.

**For a quick overview of this booklet, we recommend that you re-read the boldly printed words.** We also recommend that you read the counseling booklet on "Overcoming Temptation".



# CAMPUS LOCATIONS

## PORTLAND CAMPUS

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Portland, Oregon 97220

## TIGARD CAMPUS

12244 SW Garden Pl  
Tigard, Oregon 97223

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14311 SE Mill Plain Boulevard  
Vancouver, Washington 98684

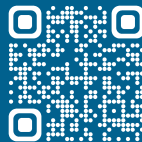
## EUGENE CAMPUS

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