

Don't Go Back to Egypt!

by Rev. David Julen

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FAITH FIGHTING ADDICTION

*A PROGRAM OF GASTON CONTROLLED
SUBSTANCES COALITION*

How to use this study

This study uses the Israelites' journey and experiences in the Exodus to illustrate steps an individual can take to break bad habits and addictions, and to change unhealthy relationships. In addition, it is intended to help all participants understand the difficult journey traveled by those suffering from addiction to reach healing and wholeness. We are called to walk along with God's people as they struggle to reach freedom and to be the people God intended for them to be from the beginning.

The Israelites' Exodus journey had three distinct phases:

- ***Out of Egypt***
- ***Through the Wilderness***
- ***To the Promised Land***
- **Part One** of this study focuses on the damaging effects of bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships that restrict the life God desires for us.
- **Part Two** introduces the first steps toward healing and wholeness: admitting the need for help and call out to God.
- **Part Three** details how God helps to face fears and failures and helps to take steps for healing.

According to a Pew Research Study (Oct. 26, 2017), 46% of Americans know someone who is currently or has been addicted to substances. So, it is safe to say, at least half or more of any church congregation has a personal experience with addiction. This study uses the Israelites' journey and experiences in the Exodus to illustrate steps an individual can take to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships. Every person has some part of their life they need to change: a habit they want to stop or a healthy one they want to start, an addiction from which to recover, or a relationship they would like to change for the better. An additional purpose of the study is to help all participants better understand the process of recovery. This is done by comparing events in the Exodus to the steps involved in recovery. As believers, we are called to walk along with God's people as they struggle to reach freedom and to be the people God intended them to be from the beginning.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

Part One

GETTING OUT OF EGYPT

EXODUS 2:23-34

The purpose of this sermon is to draw parallels between the experience of God's people in Egypt, Moses' experience at the burning bush, and the experience of the listeners in breaking bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships.

OUTLINE

- **Bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships can limit and restrict the life God desires for us.**

The Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt by oppressive masters. Bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships can enslave, diminish, and restrict our lives, often with our own permission.

- **The first step in breaking the bondage and enslavement is to call for help as the Israelites did in Egypt.**

This comes from the realization of the extent of damage a problem is causing or how ineffective one's own efforts to change have been. *Why are people reluctant to ask for help?*

Asking for help requires humility and emotional strength (James 4:2, James 4:12).

- **The next step is to face our fears and failures.**

We see this in Moses' experience at the burning bush in chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus. *Moses had to face his **past** for his people to have a **future**.* God challenges Moses to act, to take steps to become who God has called him to be. *Why is it important to face our past?*

- **Taking steps!**

All meaningful change requires significant spiritual and emotional energy and resources. For the Christian, it is grace and work, it is sacrifice and surrender. We see this in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, as we respond to God making a way to break bad habits, addictions, and to change unhealthy relationships.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART ONE: GETTING OUT OF EGYPT

Bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships can restrict and limit the life we desire and the life God intends for us. They can enslave, diminish, and restrict us, often with our own permission.

THREE PHASES OF ENSLAVEMENT

The teacher can use his or her own examples or use some of the following to help people reflect and identify traits they need to change.

1. **Bad Habits:** These can range from the seemingly benign timewasters to debilitating activities. e.g. biting fingernails, unhealthy eating, watching too much tv, spending too much time on social media, being late, interrupting others, using profanity, overspending.

2. **Addictions:** An addiction might be characterized as a chronic, compulsive disorder that one continues despite harmful consequences. Harmful or illegal substances, shopping, pornography, work, are all examples of things that can be addictive. These diminish our lives and relationships.

3. **Unhealthy Relationships:** There are two aspects to unhealthy relationships that need to be changed:

- Spending time with people who lead us to do illegal, unsafe, or unhealthy activities.

- Traits in our existing relationships that limit the lives God desires for us to live. Some examples of traits that limit and hurt relationships are uncontrolled anger, domestic violence, lying, overspending, breaking promises, passive-aggressive tendencies, illicit sexual activities, selfishness, or self-absorption.

“

“Almost anything is easier to get into, than to get out of.”

Agnes Allen

In Exodus 1:1-11, the Israelites are immigrating to Egypt to avoid dying by famine. After Joseph's death, the Egyptians turn against the Hebrew people and enslave them.

Often, bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships seem to be managed for a short period of time. As time goes on, however, the effects of these bad decisions and unhealthy relationships become more visible and debilitating. They hinder the path God has planned for each of His followers.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART ONE: GETTING OUT OF EGYPT

According to Lesli Koppleman Ross, Egypt, in Hebrew is called Mitzrayim. The name means "narrow straits." In Egypt, God's people were constricted by slavery, controlled by oppressive masters that narrowed and restricted their lives. They were unable to flourish. The quality of their lives was limited because their choices were limited. The freedom to stand on their own - to not be dependent on their masters - was stifled. Bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships can become like bondage in our lives like the bondage of God's people in Egypt.

STEP ONE

The first step in breaking the bondage is to admit the need for help, as the Israelites did in Egypt.

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. - Exodus 2:23-24

One must face the fact that they are falling short in the life they desire, and the life God desires for them. This may come in a gradual realization or in a blinding moment of clarity because of a failure, a job loss, a divorce, or even an arrest. These painful events can lead to a deep realization of helplessness and brokenness that causes them to turn to God for help.

In an article entitled "2 Words That Make Asking for Help a Lot Easier" in the business magazine, *Inc.*, author Amy Morin identifies the difference between being willing or unwilling to seek help is the attitude of being "mentally strong" vs. just "acting tough." A mentally strong person recognizes when they need help. They can deal with the emotions that come from a recognition they are falling short in a certain area. They are mentally strong enough to face an accurate appraisal of the situation. A person "acting tough" masks their weaknesses by pretending they have it all together and turns a blind eye to their shortcomings.

Morin recommends using two words to start the healing process: "*I'm struggling.*" These words acknowledge you are having a hard time and open dialogue to begin addressing the problem. The Christian recognizes this process in relation to their faith. It is the realization that salvation comes only by confessing sin and helplessness, "*for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God...*" (Rom. 3:23) For the Christian, the truth of sinfulness brings a blessed realization of shortcomings and the need for God's grace. They are beyond struggling, hopelessly in need, but the realization leads to a confession of that hopelessness and a realization of the need for Christ.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART ONE: GETTING OUT OF EGYPT

This first step requires humility and the realization that human efforts are not enough.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up! - James 4:12.

You do not have because you do not ask. - James 4:2

Other Scriptures calling upon God for help are: Isaiah 30:18-19, James 1:5, Psalm 121:2, and Matthew 7:7-8.

Asking for God's help to change means we realize we cannot do it on our own. This requires humility and courage.

Questions to ask ourselves:

1. Where do I need help?
2. What habits continually sabotage my life?
3. Which one of my relationships needs help most urgently?
4. Is the same trait or habit sabotaging more than one relationship?
5. What trusted friend or relative could I ask if they believe I have a problem?

STEP TWO

The next step is seen in the call of Moses at the burning bush in Exodus, chapters 3 and 4. In this encounter, God empowers Moses to take specific action steps to free God's people. God causes Moses to face his failures (fleeing Egypt) and his fears (public speaking). Paradoxically, Moses had to **go back** to Egypt to get his people **out** of Egypt.

Moses had to face his past for his people to have a future. God was relentless in getting Moses to take action steps to free his people and face his past.

- God reveals His name (Ex. 3:14).
- God reveals miraculous signs (Ex. 4:1-12).
- God recruits Aaron (Ex. 4:14-16).

Scriptural examples of changing a pattern in response to a problem: Moses complaining, but taking his father-in-law's advice and restructuring the leadership (Ex. 18:1-27); and the disciples reacting to the needs of the widows in the early church and recruiting the first deacons (Acts 6:1-7).

STEP THREE

An example of needing to take steps:

The testimony of many in Alcoholics Anonymous is that the first three steps of the program are vital and important; however, they are not enough.

The first three steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We decided to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Multiple testimonies reveal recovering addicts did not get solidly on the path of sobriety until participants began to attend meetings and work the rest of the steps.

"All meaningful change requires significant spiritual and emotional energy and resources."

These steps included admitting to God and to someone else the exact nature of our wrong, admitting the wrongs committed upon others, making amends where possible, and being willing to openly commit to help others overcome alcoholism.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART ONE: GETTING OUT OF EGYPT

These steps call upon the participant to face their failures and weaknesses as Moses had to face his failure in Egypt. Completing these steps begins to diminish the power and shame that past actions have. They strengthen the ability to live an abundant and redeemed life. Facing and admitting where one is wrong and attempting to make amends is a pattern for healing and strengthening relationships that have been damaged by bad habits or unhealthy actions.

If "Going Back to Egypt" is used as a metaphor for facing painful or traumatic experiences, this step may mean acknowledging how a person or event was harmful or abusive. This may mean no longer keeping toxic secrets or seeking counseling for help and healing.

Changing any deeply embedded pattern requires a great deal of energy. To get Pharaoh to allow Egypt's primary workforce to leave Egypt took God's mighty hand. All meaningful change requires significant spiritual and emotional energy and resources.

Paul has this type of commitment in mind when it comes to Christians desiring to please God. It is all encompassing, an act of worship, offering bodies as a living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Christians desiring to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships must offer their whole self to Christ in a continuous pattern of transformation and renewal. It will require perseverance, courage, and peer support. Each person should seek the Lord through prayer, worship, listening to wise counsel and making steps to move out of the bondage of addictions, bad habits and unhealthy relationship patterns. However, we need to remember it is not simply "Try harder!" It is a delicate balance between surrendering to Christ and exerting effort to change.

We need to be reminded God's love for us is not because of our success. Instead, it's the love of a Father in heaven for His child.

He provides an avenue to escape sin and temptation, but there is responsibility upon the believer to walk through the door that God is opening.

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. - 1 Corinthians 10:13

SUMMARY

- Bad habits, addictions, and unhealthy relationships can be like enslavement in Egypt. They limit and restrict our lives.
- The first step is to realize you need help and to ask God to help.
- The second step is to step out in faith, to act! To face and deal with past actions like Moses at the burning bush.
- Changing deeply embedded patterns requires spiritual and emotional resources. It combines surrender and commitment.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

Part Two

GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

NUMBERS 11:4-6

The purpose of part two is to encourage those trying to change or those waiting on someone to change to think about why it often takes longer than we think it should.

OUTLINE

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost — also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" - Numbers 11:4-6

Why is change and recovery so hard?

- We may be out of Egypt, but we don't yet have Egypt out of us.
- The daily grind of trying to break bad habits, addictions, and change unhealthy relationship can cause discouragement.
- Blessings and progress can be overlooked like the Israelites overlooked the manna and quail in the wilderness.
- It is necessary to be realistic about the difficulties of change from deeply embedded patterns in life (Romans 7:18-19).
- Real change takes time.

What needs to die in your life?

- One reason it takes a period to heal is that our brains are impacted, changed, and shaped by our actions, and it takes time for our brain to heal (parable of the Sower - Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8)
- The most difficult times may be the "walkin' and not faintin'" days (Isaiah 40:29-31)

Difficult days are to be expected, but God gives strength to the weary and power to the weak!

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

The purpose of Part Two is encouragement. It is meant to give those trying to change, or those waiting on someone to change, a way to think about why it often takes longer than we think it should.

Why is change and recovery so hard?

We may be out of Egypt, but we don't yet have Egypt out of us!*

The first point of emphasis is the Israelites' time in the wilderness. Although they are free from their Egyptian masters, they are not free from the attitudes and habits they have developed over their time in captivity. These traits can be a form of slavery. This part of the study gives a reason and a warning as to why it can take longer to change than expected.

The second point of emphasis is that beating bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships can be less about mountaintop spiritual experiences and more about daily decisions to change. These decisions require perseverance and encouragement from others, a focus not on the scope of the change, but the next few minutes, the next decision, to walk and not faint.

ATTITUDE & HABITS

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost — also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" - Numbers 11:4-6

The daily grind of trying to break bad habits, addictions and change unhealthy relationships can cause discouragement.

The difficulty of making a change can cause people to diminish the pain and problems their decisions and lifestyle caused in the past. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, when the going gets tough, they might long for a past that did not really exist or one that softens the edges of the problems. The Israelites looked back on the abundance and variety of food in Egypt and overlooked the harshness of their slavery. Some may begin to focus on the past, conveniently forgetting past problems, and revising the full effect of their actions on others.

It's difficult to see glimpses of progress. It can be easy to take for granted improvements in the day to day and in relationships previously longed for.

Can you think of something or someone you prayed fervently for at one time but now take for granted? A job, a reconciliation, the results of a medical procedure, a spouse, a healthy child, or a home?

*William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*.

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PART TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Grace may be disregarded, in the same manner many of the Israelites in the wilderness overlooked the quail and manna. Successes and blessings that were strongly desired are now taken for granted. Many have found keeping a prayer journal can be helpful. When writing down needs and concerns, it often doesn't take long to turn back a few pages to see those that have been answered and resolved. This can help to be encouraged in struggles and help be encouragers to others, reminders of the blessings received, and the progress made.

It's necessary to be realistic about the difficulties of change from deeply embedded patterns in life.

In the bestselling book, *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins, he interviews the highest ranking officer captured in the Vietnam War, Admiral James Stockdale. Stockdale, a prisoner of war for over eight years, endured repeated bouts of torture and abuse. Collins asked Stockdale how he was able to survive and deal with such a brutal experience. "I never lost faith in the end of the story," he said. "I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

Collins didn't say anything for many minutes, as they walked slowly with Stockdale limping and arc-swinging his stiff leg that had never fully recovered from repeated torture. Finally, after about a hundred meters of silence, Collins asked, "Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh, that's easy," Stockdale said "the optimists. They were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

"This is a very important lesson." Stockdale continued. "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

In reality, deeply embedded patterns in behavior can be very difficult to change. We are reminded of the Apostle Paul's cry in Romans 7:18-19: "*For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.*"

Too often, people minimize the difficulty in changing, and when change does not come easily or comes slower than anticipated, they give up.

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PART TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Remembering to be realistic, but faithful in turning to God when overcoming patterns that limit or enslave.

Someone suffering from addiction needs to set their face like flint, as Jesus did heading toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), realistically viewing the hardships, but having faith in God's grace, mercy, and power.

Some difficulties take longer to resolve even by the very hand of Jesus. Sometimes the healing doesn't come all at once, but gradually. See for example Mark 8:23-25: *"And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking.' Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly."*

Why did God allow the Israelites to spend 40 years in the wilderness? It likely took only a few months to get hundreds of thousands of people out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites. One generation that was formed by slavery had to die.

On a less literal level, it means that something must die to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships.

What needs to die?

What about outlook or attitude? Maybe a way of thinking or feeling about something? Priorities? What is treated or regarded as most important? Self-image? A mental picture of one's abilities, appearance, or personality. It will not take 40 years, but it will not take a few days either. "It takes nine months to have a baby, no matter how many people you have on the job." (*An American Proverb*)

One reason it takes a period of time to heal, is that our brains are impacted and changed, shaped by actions.

For example, it takes time for the brains of those in recovery to heal. Studies show abstinence or sobriety improves many mental functions that were damaged by addiction. These range from the recovery of brain tissue volume (areas that deal with cravings and decision making), increased cortical grey matter (associated with memory, emotions, muscle control, speech and decision making) and white matter (plays a role in active learning and memory), and increased density in neocortical areas (that part of the brain associated with judgement and decision making).

This all takes time. The speed of recovery is influenced by the age of the person, the length of their abuse, genetics, and other medical factors. In a matter of weeks, one may see improved coping skills and cognitive abilities, while other skills and abilities can take months, even years to recover. Each day in sobriety gives the brain the chance to heal and recover.

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PART TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Our ability to evaluate recovery from addiction or the progress of breaking a habit is often skewed because much healing happens “silently” without significant visual success. One is

reminded of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. The seed that falls into the good soil is buried, does not sprout quickly, but develops roots and produces a hundredfold. Satan wants those suffering from addiction (and everyone else) to think recovery is futile, and they must fight their own sinful nature which pushes them to quit because recovery is so difficult.

This biblical image of the seed, quietly growing underground, can be helpful for the individual in recovery and for their loved ones. Family and friends can remind the one struggling of this biblical image when discouragement sets in. The seed that seems to be inactive is actually growing and changing, like the mind in recovery is healing and transforming.

EXAMPLE

Often the most difficult days in breaking a pattern are the days after the initial decision and before results or much change is seen. Those are days like Pastor John Claypool noted after the death of his daughter, Laura Lu. In his book, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, Claypool noted that scholars observe that the climax of the following text from Isaiah is not spiritual exaltation, (soaring on wings like eagles), or even accomplishing tasks (running, and not growing weary). The pinnacle of the text is being able to walk and not faint (verse 31).

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. - Isaiah 40:29-31

Claypool said the days he needed the greatest strength from the Lord were the days he simply felt it was all he could do to put one foot in front of another; to walk and not faint.

The way he dealt with grief can be applied to how we can break bad habits and addictions and change unhealthy relationships. We tend to believe the intensity of our commitment to change is the greatest factor in our success. We may think an alter call at our church or even an intense or emotional conversation is the best indicator of success. However, the best indicator of success may be the plan you have to get through the morning.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Some examples:

For habits: To get through a work break without a cigarette, bring a healthy snack with you and play a game on your phone to have something to do with your hands.

For addictions: Go home a different way instead of by the club or bar that is an easy place to fall into temptation. Put your recovery meeting in your phone before the week starts, so it won't be forgotten.

For relationships: To plan how not to respond with a curt or sarcastic comment to an action or word in a relationship you are trying to improve. To have a difficult conversation rather than avoiding it and letting our feelings fester.

These are not exciting, uplifting, soaring like an eagle type of events. They are not running and not growing weary, high energy tasks. These are quiet inward personal decisions that help to walk and not faint; the decisions made in solitude to keep putting one foot in front of another. The "*Walkin' and Not Faintin'*" times are often what determines whether someone "goes back to Egypt" or breaks bad habits, addictions, and changes unhealthy relationships.

SUMMARY

It will take time to get rid of deeply embedded patterns in relationships, long time habits, and destructive addictions. God does have the power to heal instantaneously and certainly does, at times; however, this may not be everyone's story. If someone wants to get well, they have to live out their story. It took a relatively short time for God to get his people out of Egypt once Moses arrived. Yet it took 40 years to get the effects of slavery in Egypt out of many of God's people. Don't be too discouraged when results come slower than anticipated.

Difficult days are to be expected. Those struggling should call upon the Lord for the daily strength to walk and not faint. The most fervent prayer may be needed for putting one foot in front of another, to get out of bed, to make the kids lunch, to have a conversation with a client. One can expect "*Walkin' and Not Faintin'*" days, but God gives strength to the weary and power to the weak (Isaiah 40:39).

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

Part Three

PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-8

Sermon three summarizes the main points of the first two studies and focuses on building habits to help avoid relapse and falling back into unhealthy patterns. This study sees Deuteronomy 6:1-8 as God's instructions to his people on how not to lose the land he had given them by giving in to pagan values. The principles embedded in these instructions can help us preserve and continually renew our lives in overcoming bad habits and addictions and changing unhealthy relationships.

OUTLINE

Review

- Call upon the Lord for help (Exodus 2:23-24).
- Moses had to face his past and go back to Egypt for his people to have a future (Exodus 3 & 4).
- Success requires perseverance

What "bit of Egypt" needs to die in your life?

- Breaking bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships requires "Perseverance in the Promised Land."
- Moses instructed his people to focus on commitment and to develop daily habits.

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART THREE: PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

Part three summarizes the main points of the first two studies and focuses on building habits to help avoid relapse and falling back into unhealthy patterns. This study sees Deuteronomy 6:1-8 as God's instructions to His people on how not to lose the land God had given them by giving in to pagan values. These instructions call for daily and weekly discipleship and commitment.

These are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. -

Deuteronomy 6:1-8

It is almost unbearable to watch a beloved individual or team lose something they seemingly have won: a runner that pulls up too soon or a team that celebrates and allows the opposition to score. Both illustrate a loss of focus and commitment. In this part, we are going to examine God's instructions about how to preserve the hard-fought victories by "Persevering in the Promised Land."

LET'S REVIEW

Call upon the Lord for help.

Getting out of Egypt, breaking bad habits and addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships require a great deal of energy. That is why it's vital to call upon the Lord for help as the Israelites did (Ex. 2:23-24; Psalm 116:1-2). These unhealthy traits and patterns can be deeply embedded in someone's life. God's power is needed to overcome them. Calling upon the Lord also requires someone to admit they need help. It's necessary to acknowledge something is a problem to begin to overcome it. The Christian desiring to change walks the delicate balance between surrendering to God's power to change (Phil. 1:6) and exerting effort to grow (Phil. 2:12).

Moses had to face his past and go back to Egypt for his people to have a future.

God called Moses to go back to Egypt from where he had fled as a murderer and a failure, to step out in faith and stretch himself far beyond what he believed he could accomplish (Ex. 3-4).

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART THREE: PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

To break bad habits and addictions, and to change unhealthy relationships, one must admit they have a problem and step out in faith to overcome it. It may be necessary to have difficult conversations because of past actions or to confront long festering problems. In Luke 3, the people are convicted by John the Baptist preaching. They ask, “*What then should we do?*” (Luke 3:10) John then tells the crowd to share with others, tax collectors to not cheat people, soldiers not to extort money. He tells them in response to God’s mercy they are to act. To break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships, one has to do more than acknowledge the bad effects of their lifestyle; they need to act. They need to change!

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we must persevere through discouragement.

The day to day difficulties of the wilderness discouraged the Israelites, causing them to look back to a past that overlooked the burdens of slavery. It was a revisionist history of life in Egyptian slavery, longing for ease and abundance of food rather than facing the day to day struggles of living as a free people.

Most entrenched bad habits, addictions and unhealthy relationships take time to work out. One generation formed by slavery and pagan values had to die. What “bit of Egypt” needs to die in your life?

- Your outlook?
- Your attitude?
- Your priorities?
- Your self-image?

What needs to die or be transformed to break the bad habits and addictions that limit your life? What individuals do you need to avoid to not fall back into unhealthy patterns? What are the patterns, responses and unhealthy expectations in your relationships that restrict and mar your life?

“It took a few months to get the Israelites out of Egypt, but 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites.”

WILLIAM BRIDGES
MANAGING TRANSITIONS

PERSEVERANCE IN THE PROMISED LAND

Breaking bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships requires "perseverance in the Promised Land."

When trying to break dysfunctional patterns of behavior, one often lets their guard down after initial success. The book of Deuteronomy illustrates a call to show love for God by upholding God’s covenant and obeying his teachings. Before the massive military campaign to enter the Promised Land, one might assume there would be detailed instructions from the Lord dealing with military strategy. Instead, the emphasis is on cultivating habits to combat the pagan influences that will undermine the initial military victories. The military victories are almost taken for granted if God’s people remain faithful. Even before the launch of the campaign, God is instructing his people how to live in the not yet conquered land. That is where the real danger lies!

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART THREE: PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

Moses instructed his people to focus on commitment and develop daily habits:

- *Love the Lord with your entire being* (vv. 5-6) – Lasting change requires complete commitment after the initial victories.
- *Impress them on your children* – Cultivate habits for the next generation. This can only be done by repeated instructions, regular teaching through word and deed.
- *Talk about them...at home...when you lie down...when you get up...when you are walking...tie them on your hands...bind them on your heard...write them on the door frame and gates* (vv. 7-9).

A continuous commitment is needed to avoid falling back into old habits and patterns of behavior. A daily discipline of prayer and personal renewal, a commitment to change how we respond to negative situations is what leads to lasting and significant change. This leads to what the writer of Hebrews calls us to lay aside the sins “*that beset us and easily entangle us*” (Hebrews 12:1, KJV).

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:1-2

For the writer of Hebrews, faith is far more than simple belief. It is the spiritual power from which comes the energy that enables believers to live ethical and moral lives. The writer of Hebrews is connecting the perseverance that the “Hall of Fame” faithful showed in their lives in chapter 11 to exhort the faithful readers to throw off the sin that besets or so easily entangles. “*The Greek word used for race is agnon from which we get the word ‘agonize.’ The picture the writer of Hebrews is trying to convey is ... rigorous training, self-discipline, and intense effort. The word perseverance, hypomone in the Greek has a sense of endurance in the face of hostile forces...*” - Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol. XII, Fred Craddock, page 148

Research on the brain reveals that falling back into old patterns can be as simple as reverting to an old routine.

Habits never really disappear. They are encoded into the structures of our brain and that is a huge advantage for us, because it would be awful if we had to relearn how to drive after every vacation. The problem is that your brain can't tell the difference between good and bad habits, and so if you had a bad one, it's always lurking there waiting for the right cues and rewards.” - *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg, page 20

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

PART THREE: PERSEVERING IN THE PROMISED LAND

This insight about human nature is possibly why God inspired these texts about daily routine. In a culture constantly giving cues and encouragement for pagan practices, the daily commitments were intended to guide God's people to avoid these practices. This routine was about immersing the Hebrews into daily focus to living the values of their faith.

Think about the many Biblical warnings about "backsliding" to individuals and the nation of Israel to avoid going back to former ways by "flirting" with pagan practices:

- King Ahaz walked back in the "high places" and returned to the way of pagan kings (2 Kings 16:1-4).
- God gave instructions to Moses to destroy the "high places" so the temptation to walk in their ways would be removed (Numbers 33:50-53).
- The prophet Hosea called upon his people to repent so God would heal them (Hosea 14:1-4).
- In Paul's letters to the church in Galatia, he exhorted the church members to not turn back *"to those weak and miserable practices"* (Galatians 4:8-11).
- This is seen in the words of Jesus to put your hand to the plow and not go back (Luke 9:62).
- John says to stay away from sinful practices and acquaintances; to intentionally walk in the light and not in the darkness (1 John 1:5-7).
- In the book of Revelation, the church at Ephesus is called to remember the *"...heights from which you have fallen"* and called to repent. (Revelation 2:4-5).

This may mean choosing to go to a support group even when we don't feel like we need it.

This means staying away from acquaintances that could cause us to relapse or fall into old habits. *"Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character!"* 1 Corinthians 15:33.

This means a daily recommitment and focus on practicing the habits to build and maintain healthy relationships.

This means reading the Bible, and daily prayer, even when it feels like the prayers go no further than the ceiling.

This means attending worship when the sermon series seems irrelevant.

These habits prepare us to be receptive to things we have no idea God is going to do.

These observations about the Israelite's journey out of slavery through the wilderness and into the Promised Land reveals steps needed to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships.

This series using the Israelites' journey out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land can help everyone identify steps to help change their lives and recognize ways to help others in a journey to healing and wholeness.