

Goal Success & Habit Work for Christians

This handout is a combination of Bible study, what I've gleaned over the years, as well as some habit tools from Dr. David Burn's TEAM-CBT. Get his FREE book chapter on habits with the tools in * on his website, www.feelinggood.com (let me know if you have trouble). A new book I'm just reading is "Atomic Habits" by James Clear and might be helpful as well. You'll want to find tools that work for you. We don't all think alike and thus not all tools work the same. That said, there are common factors in human thinking and behaviour so the outline and principles will be helpful to most readers. Note: I may use alcohol and other behaviours as examples, but you can insert any habit in the framework.

I like to have a quick guide when getting started so here it is from the start:

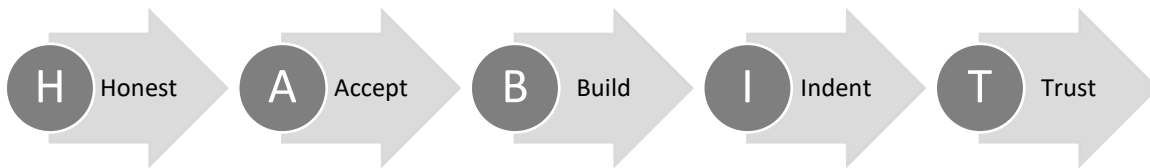
7 Steps Quick Bible Study for Habit Change



Sometimes the quick and easy works fine, but often we have to invest more time and effort in the change we want.

Stages of Goal Success & Habit Work

Let's lead with a quote from my favourite author, "God is our strength. We must look to Him for wisdom and guidance, and keeping in view His glory... and the salvation of our own souls, we must overcome... We should individually seek to obtain new victory every day. We must learn to... depend wholly upon God. The sooner we learn this the better. Let each one find out where he fails, and then faithfully watch that his sins (habits) do not overcome him, but that he gets the victory over them." Ellen White, Early Writings, pg. 105



Creating good habits and breaking bad ones use the same tools. But we can't just throw tools at the wall and hope to hang a lovely picture. There is a system or order to doing anything worthwhile and forming habits is no different. I've come up with an acronym (see above) to help us on this journey.

Be Honest With Yourself!



Obviously, we need to see we have a problem in the first place. Denial is a big problem for those facing habit issues. It's unlikely you are in denial if you are reading this. That said, during the whole process of goal setting and habit formation we have to be honest with ourselves. What do we really want? Why do we want it? How will we get there? What are my temptations? What are the reasons I don't want to

change?

We have to be real with ourselves. Optimism can be the biggest cause of failure. This will be hard. This will take effort. You won't always feel motivated. This won't be easy and at times we will have to do things we don't feel like doing. You might even give in from time to time, will that make you give up?

Mary, demons cast out 7X! She still clung to Jesus! We all face repeated challenges but only those who are honest with themselves about those challenges can overcome them. Does no good to just keep hoping for the best, wishing for an outcome. And it does no good to fall into despair when we don't get the outcome we want as fast as we want.

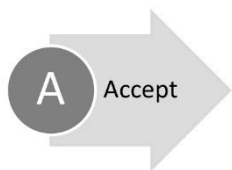
When I was a youth, my favorite speaker shared an analogy about getting free from sin. It goes something like this. Imagine with me right now you're filthy. You are dirty, greasy and grimy. And you decide you want to get clean. So, all oily and gross, you hop in the shower. As you turn on the water, you realize you're going to need soap to get all that oil and grease and grime off. You grab the soap and start lathering up, singing away in the shower. Things are looking good. The water is warm, the soap smells lovely, and you start to get some of the dirt off. It's feeling wonderful. And then..... you drop the soap. Now logic would say just pick up the soap and continue, but the enemy comes in to discourage us. He whispers, "Oh look! you dropped the soap. Shame on you! You're such a failure. You can't even hold on to something so simple. You've dropped the soap, there's no hope of getting clean with all that grease

you are covered in. Since you can't get clean without the soap there is no point in staying in the shower. You may as well get out. Yup, you drop the soap there is no hope, get out of the shower." It's a funny little analogy but it stuck with me my whole life. All I have to remind myself is "no hope you dropped the soap" and it reminds me I can simply pick up the soap again! I don't have to listen to the enemy. "There's no point, why bother?" Are very tempting thoughts but you can speak back to those tempting thoughts.

Another part of being honest is, be willing to look at yourselves honestly to see where you might fail, or if you did fail, why. One of the best tools I've every used for pre-emptive negative tempting thought is a Triple Paradox* which we will talk more about later.

Yes, you to might have to pick up the soap again on this habit journey, in fact I would bet on it! Beating yourself up only leads us to the most prevalent and successful lie of the enemy, "No hope you dropped the soap." Let's be honest, we all drop the soap from time to time. We only fail when we don't pick it back up!

Accept Your Human Condition



We have a carnal nature and live in a sinful world that will tempt us. Just because you are tempted doesn't mean you have to give and it doesn't mean you've failed. Jesus was tempted in all points like us yet without sin.

In our human condition motivation is fleeting. I have some bad news – there are no motivation pills. We can not make ourselves feel like doing something all the time.

It annoys me how many books and gurus build a business on attempting to give other motivation. It rarely lasts unless the person is already motivated and they are just reenforcing what the person already has. Rarely can we create long term motivation. Sure, we can hear a bunch of fact on how bad smoking is and that might motivate someone to consider stop smoking, but until they DECIDE or CHOOSE for themselves that limited motivation doesn't go anywhere!

BUT there is also good news. Great news in fact! We can choose to do something, or not do something, without feeling motivated to do so. Even better news!!! Motivation often follows action. Once you choose and make effort in that direction motivation often kicks in. We will take about making very simple, easy steps to meet your goal. This is why we spend so much time on creating a short, even silly, mini goal. These tiny steps work to moving you forward into larger feats!

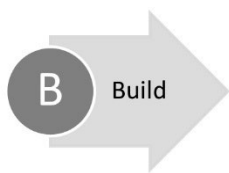
One of the trainers, for Nedley's Depression Recovery Program I took in 2006 told a story of client who called in struggling to do the exercise portion of the program. She told the person, "OK I tell you what, you don't have to exercise. All you have to do is go get your runners and put them on. And then you can sit and watch TV." The caller was surprised and didn't think that would do any good, but agreed. What do you think happened when that person put on their runners? Yeah, once they put the shoes on they went for the walk. The motivation followed the action. In psychology we call this behavioral activation. It's a very important part of depression recovery because depression sucks the life out of your motivation, but it's absolutely critical in Habit work.

Don't get me wrong, at times God takes away our desires. My husband prayed for victory over alcohol and once he chose to quit, he hasn't been tempted to drink in over 30 years. Smoking on the other hand tempted him for several years after he chose to quit. This isn't a problem though because God will not allow you to be tempted more than you are able to bear. More on that later.

Our human condition also means we might resist some of the process or even the outcome to our goal. You'll need to accept there will be things you'll have to do differently, things you have to give up to accomplish your goal. You might not want to do that, and if so you can stop reading right now. It's totally your choice if you work on your goal or not.

Deprivation is the clinical word we use in habit work to delineate there is something you'll have to give up. Even for positive goals, since they will require time, so you'll have to give up something else you'd rather be doing. They will require effort, so you'll have to give up ease. They might require specific tools, they might cost money. You get the idea.

Build Up Good Habits from a Great Foundation



Build on a great foundation. I highly recommend you consider how you can build your relationship with Christ. When we abide in Him, He can work in us, He can send the Holy Spirit to change us and empower us. Focusing on God and what He wants for us can also help with motivation.

Do you have quality prayer and study time? Are you checking in with God throughout the day? What can you do to increase your faith? General spiritual principles can go a long way in building your reserves for working on habits.

You may find in order to deal with your bad habit there are steps to take beforehand. Sometimes we need to deal with our stinking thinking as they say in the 12 step program. In TEAM-CBT* we call this mood work. It may be you need to deal with your depressive thoughts because those will hold you back from reaching your goals. Sometimes you need to deal with your habits first. This is especially the case when there's an addiction or habit that reduces clarity of thought, such as with drugs and alcohol. This may also be the case in extreme mental illness where one needs medication such as schizophrenia or bipolar

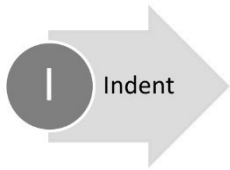
Our foundation can't be a slippery slope. I often have clients who want to stop procrastinating or lose weight because they feel like that will make them happy. This is a slippery slope. As you work on your habit you can easily lose motivation because you are still miserable during the process. Even when you have some success there are problems. I can tell you from firsthand experience, and as a psychotherapist, our happiness is not related to our external circumstances. We can be fat and happy. We can also be skinny and unhappy. So we can lose the weight and still feel miserable so then we eat five hot fudge sundaes and gain it all back!

Of course, it's your choice what you want to work on but I'd be remiss if I didn't put it out there. It's important to understand our thoughts can trip us up in many way, one of which is in thinking we have to meet some kind of goal to be happy. So if you want to build up healthy thinking I recommend the free booklet on my website, "The Truth Will Set You Free" and visit Dr. David Burns, www.feelinggood.com for free podcasts and courses on depression and anxiety.

The last part of Build is noting that building up good habits, along side of avoiding bad ones, can be more helpful. Having a doable goal, you move forward to, along side of a negative goal you are moving away from, is far more powerful than just avoiding bad things. In fact, you can make the positive goal part of who you want to be as a person, IE: "I am sober" vs "I don't want to be a drunk".

To do this, create a positive goal from a habit you want to change, explore the reason you want to change? Or you can think about what is the opposite of the bad habit?

Right Intentions Rather than Good Ones



We can intend to do a lot of things that never happen. Have you ever intended to exercise or call a friend but got too busy or forgot or a host of other things got in the way? We are weak and thus our intentions are weak.

But there is a way to use intentionality to your advantage. We put on Christ's righteousness. We don't will ourselves to do the thing we need to do.

Here is a promise we can bank on, Luke 16:13 "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." If we serve God, we can't serve self! This means if we put God first, other things will fall into place.

But more than that, when we focus on God as our source of strength, rather than on trying to will ourselves to do "this thing" we will have much more power behind us. Infinite power!

The Right Use of the Will...

Step 1. I have a choice. I can change because God has given me free will

Step 2. I believe all God's biddings are enablings

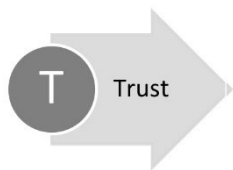
Step 3. I choose to trust God (NOT I will myself to 'do' this thing or not do this thing!)

Let's look at an example so you can see this in action. I am on a healthy lifestyle journey and part of that is to stop eating between meals. Especially in the evening. Now when I feel the urge or craving to eat something, even an apple, I can do battle with that craving. IE: I can tell myself, "I don't need it, it's not part of my goal, etc."

These self-control thoughts can and do work. However, even better is if in that moment I reach out to God and bring Him into the conversation. IE: I can tell myself, "God has supplied all my needs. He wants me to be healthy so I can serve Him and others. He wants me to be healthy so I can be happy." I can even combine the two of these.

What doesn't work is trying to will myself to not crave the apple or tell myself, "I shouldn't eat that." Or thinks relating to my own power to do things. I don't have what it takes to do battle with the enemy, he's had thousands of years to come up with his game plan. Honesty & acceptance of my human condition, rather than worldly positive thinking and mantras, will be far more successful.

Trust God's Got You



Speaking of putting your will on the side of God, would God ever ask you to do something impossible? What kind of God would that be?

Isaiah 43:2, "When thou passest through the waters, I WILL BE WITH THEE; and THROUGH THE RIVERS, they SHALL NOT OVERFLOW THEE: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Near the end of this handout is a Bible study on Victorious Living, but I encourage you to study for yourself and compile Bible texts that build your faith that God can and will help you to do anything that glorifies His name.

Understanding our resistance to change

Carnal nature

Ok, we talked briefly about this. Human nature sucks! I get it. I have one too! Many times I wish I could just not be tempted, that I could change my urges or fix my lack of motivation. But glorification will not happen till heaven so that means we have to wrestle with that, every moment of every day.

James 1:8 ESV "He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Full context. V7-8 "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." We have to admit our doubt, or it will come back to make us unstable. We can't just pretend we have it all together. That is NOT faith!

We can want two opposite things, but we can't do two opposite things at the same time. If we don't unpack which of these two things is stronger in a given moment, then our resistance to changing can trip us up when we stop feeling motivated. Remember motivation is the one thing we can't manufacture at the drop of a hat. To unpack this we can use a tool called the Triple Paradox.*

Triple Paradox*

I never do habit work with a client until they've convinced me they want to change. I know, you think you want to change, but often we want the idea of the change and yet not really the change itself. One way to make sure we aren't in the dichotomous position we talked about before, "no man can serve two masters," is to list all the ways our bad habit is serving us and all the good reasons not to change along with how that aligns in a positive way with our values.

Key point here, I am not saying it's ok to have this habit that you feel it is hurting you. A destructive habit is still destructive. The fact a donut tastes good doesn't negate the effects of eating the donut with it's

calories, fat, and sugar. But there are reasons you are doing what you are doing. It's important to see those reasons in full or they can push back in your subconscious when you attempt your goal.

You can get the Triple Paradox* and instructions in David Burn's free chapter so I'll be brief here. Basically, draw three columns on a page and write, Advantages of my Habit, Disadvantages to Change, and What This Says About Me That's Positive. It can sound very strange at first so let me do an example.

Goal: Eat Healthy		Habit to change: Stop eating donuts
Advantages to eating donuts	Disadvantages of change	What this says about me that's positive
taste good reminds me of happy childhood helps me forget I'm tired	will be hard feels bad I'll have to ignore cravings	I'm realistic, I'm not in denial how hard it will be I value good memories I want to have energy, etc.

I can usually get this list to be a full page, so don't give up on the challenge. Especially the last column which may go against your way of thinking.

Tools for dealing with habits

SMART goals

We've talked a bit about forming health, positive goals you can work toward but now let's unpack that in more detail. If you've not heard about SMART goals, they are a very well documented process for ensuring a goal is doable. S-specific, M-Measurable, A-Achievable, R-Relevant, T-Timely.

Start with one primary SMART goal then add one secondary step to achieve that primary goal. The primary goal may take months to complete and you will likely need several secondary goals (smaller steps) to reach the primary one. Each of these should be SMART Goals.

Here is where the primary goal may lead to secondary goals. What is needed to reach that goal? For Example, "I want to lose 20lbs to improve my health". The secondary goals could be "I will exercise 30 minutes per day 3 days this week"; "I will fill half my plate with fruit or vegetables" and "I will only eat one 6-7" diameter plate of food at each meal." You can have several secondary goals all relating to the primary one, but each must meet the SMART criteria.

The very first step should be so simple and easy you think it's silly to even put down, IE: Primary Goal: You want to run a marathon next summer. First SMART step: Put runners on tomorrow morning at 6am. That's it. Just put the runners on. Silly, right? Wrong! Tiny, micro steps are motivating and you are less likely to have excuses or temptations to not do the smaller step.

The focus is on moving forward rather than the main goal. In fact, James Clear in his book "Atomic Habits" describes embracing these processes rather than the outcome as part of your entire way of looking at your goal. David has a specific tool along these lines called, Process vs Outcome, which in



simple is where you look at the benefits of the process rather than being frustrated over the lack of outcome. It is a good way to keep from bullying yourself when you have set backs, which WILL happen.

You can add more and more secondary steps as you complete the smaller ones. Just be careful you don't add too many, and remember you can always go back one step rather than throwing in the towel. Let's look at SMART goals in more detail.

Specific. The goal must be specific and very clear as to what you want to achieve. "I want to get healthier" is far too general, how will you know if you've accomplished it? Primary Goal examples: "I want to lose 20 lbs to improve my health" Secondary Goal examples: "Tomorrow I will not eat any chocolate." Or "Tomorrow I will eat whole grain bread in place of my white bread." Remember, the secondary goal should seem very, very easy for you.

Measurable. The goal itself must answer at least one the following questions: How will you know when you've completed the goal? What will be different? What will you have started or be doing regularly? What will you have stopped or be doing less of? Adding a number value to the goal is a great way to do this. Like our example above. "I want to lose weight vs I want to lose 20 lbs."

Achievable. The A signifies Achievable. That seems obvious, and yet many of us set goals that may not be achievable. "I want to feel 25 years old again." or "I want to stop waking up in the middle of the night." "I want to feel motivated." These goals can frustrate you. Failure is discouraging and undermines the work you are trying to do. If you do fail, then ask yourself what would make it more likely to succeed next time, and are there more secondary goals you need to add to your primary one?

Relevant. Are the secondary goals relevant to my primary goal? Will this be moving me in the right direction?

Time Bound. The goal must have a clearly defined ending point. So, looking at some of our examples we need to add a time frame, IE: "I want to lose 20lbs in 6 months." The primary goal can be longer, up to 1 year or even 5 years, but generally keep primary goals under the 1 year mark.

The secondary steps should be set at shorter intervals: 1 day, 1 week, and 1 month are good starting places. You may even have several secondary goals by the end of the month.

See also Little Steps for Big Feats* in David's free chapter.

Accountability

12 Step Programs & other Support Groups (I'm powerless to change by myself still fits right use of the will.) I won't talk to much on this since there are so many options out there. You can even get an app or a friend to be an accountability partner. I'll leave this up to you to explore but just to wet your appetite (there's a metaphor for you):

There is a free online 12 Step program from the Christian perspective here:

<https://nadhealth.org/recovery/everystepcounts/>

For healthy weight loss / exercise Loom is a good app with lots of research and even CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) tools as well as a live coach and real support groups to check in with.

Stimulus Control*

Make no provision for the flesh. Again, use the free chapter from David Burns to get some tips on this tools, but basically, what can you do to avoid the habit and the temptation of the habit. When my husband and I went on our new healthy eating plan for his diabetes, I cleaned out my pantry. I don't even buy potato chips anymore (except for special occasions, but I don't have bags of them on hand).

Tools for Developing Self-Control

Self-control deepens with use. The more you build self-control in one area of your life the more that will help you in other areas. As you build confidence you can choose, then you can change. As you change you can see what works for you and what doesn't.

Some ideas include: Ensuring you set very tiny secondary goals/steps, focusing on the process and your successes. You will have setbacks, and while they can hurt the outcome of your goal, even bring you back to 0, setbacks don't negate the progress you make in terms of your process. Each choice you made toward your goal never goes away.

Did you know, there is an average of 30 attempts to stop smoking before a smoker is successful? That means for some it's only a few attempts and for others 50 or more. What if they gave up at 49? David Burns, writes an analogy in his worksheet, "The Anti-hopelessness Memo" that talks about someone trying to move a big bolder. Imagine a big bolder on the side of a mountain you want to move by shoveling under it. How long will it take to move it? We don't know! Depends on the size of the bolder, how much shoving he can do in a day, and so on. Likewise, there are many factors at play in your goal too! Now imagine that guy digs for 30 days. Shovel by shovel. The bolder hasn't moved. Is he making progress? What if it takes 41 days to move the bolder and on day 40 he stops? It's the last shovel that breaks it free to roll down the mountain but is the last shovel full the most important or the first? Or the 38 in between?

Other ways to increase self-control is to build healthy habits up in groups. IE: Getting a good night's sleep helps you think clearer and have more energy to work on your goal. Eating a high fiber diet and drinking lots of water reduces cravings. I recommend you build an optimal health program for yourself. You can get some ideas free here: <https://feelinggreat.ca/health>

Bible Studies for Habit & Goal Setting

Deeper Bible Study – Victorious Living & Temptation

If God commanded it, you can do it. There are many Bible commands about various things we are tempted by, search those out to put His word in your heart. The following study is a general approach to build self-control and deal with temptation.

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|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. About temptation | Jas 1:12-15 |
| 2. Jesus faced every temptation | Heb 4:15,16 |
| 3. Temptation is not a sin | Lk 4:13 |
| 4. It's a lie that you have no choice | Gal 5:13 |
| 5. We can be disciplined | 1 Cor 9:27 |
| 6. We will feel urges, temptations | Gal 5:16-17 |

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|---|---------------|
| 7. We can walk by choice/faith | 2 Cor 5:7 |
| 8. Desires are from the world | 1 Jn 2:16 |
| 9. We can overcome the world | 1 Jn 4:4 |
| 10. Victory through Jesus is yours | 1 Jn 5:4 |
| 11. Satan is the deceiver | Jn 8:44 |
| 12. You'll never be tempted too much | 1 Cor 10:13 |
| 13. We are weak, but that's ok | 1 Cor 1:27-30 |
| 14. Die to self, Christ lives in you | Gal 2:20 |
| 15. The Holy Spirit empowers you | Rom 8:5-15 |
| 16. Avoid the source (resist the devil) | Jas 4:7,8 |
| 17. Avoid danger of | 1 Cor 7:5 |
| 18. Understand your triggers | Mk 14:38 |
| 19. Don't make opportunity for | Eph 4:27 |
| 20. Get through, you'll be stronger | Jas 1:3 |
| 21. Prayer an important part | Lk 22:40 |
| 22. Ask for protection | Lk 11:4 |
| 23. Put on the armor of God | Eph 6:11-16 |
| 24. Faith overcomes (build yours) | 1 John 5:4-5 |
| 25. Faith God will work in you | Phil 2:13 |
| 26. Guard with the peace of God | Phil 4:7,8 |
| 27. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit | Gal 5:22-23 |
| 28. God gives us self-control | 2 Tim 1:17 |
| 29. Grace redeems us | Tit 2:11-14 |
| 30. God promises to keep you | Jude 1:24 |

VL End

Bible Study on - Overcoming in General, Self-Control

See above FIRST, Victorious Living & Temptation

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|--|--------------|
| 1. Put others first | Rom 14:15-21 |
| 2. Do all to the glory of God | 1 Cor 10:31 |
| 3. Permission doesn't equal good or ok | 1 Cor 6:12 |
| 4. Works of the flesh a problem | Gal 5:19-21 |
| 5. Temperance is a fruit of the Spirit | Gal 5:22 |
| 6. We are to have self-control | Tit 2:3 |
| 7. Overindulgent will be lost | 1 Cor 6:10 |
| 8. Bad habits can weigh you down | Luke 21:34 |
| 9. Walk upright (not like animals) | Rom 13:13 |
| 10. Bad habits can hold you back | Pr 21:17 |
| 11. Satan waits for you to slip up | 1 Pt 5:8 |
| 12. Renewed mind discerns God's will | Rom 12:2 |

OC End

Bible Study on - Overcoming Alcohol & Other Drugs

The verses in this list are descriptive of the issue & problem. They are to provide the why, but also, since God would never ask us to do something beyond what we are able they are empowering and can be kept as promises as well. These verses can be used as your self-control thoughts to overcome the tempting thoughts. However, they will be far more effective AFTER the study on Victorious Living combined with Overcoming in General.

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|--|----------------|
| 1. Medical use ok | 1 Tim 5:23 |
| 2. Used for the dying, the suffering | Pr 31:6-7 |
| 3. Legal doesn't make it good | 1 Cor 10:23-24 |
| 4. Two kinds of wine in the Bible | Pr 23:31-32 |
| 5. New wine in the cluster | Is 65:8 |
| 6. Has a season (aging = more alcohol) | Hos 2:9 |
| 7. Old wine is addictive | Luke 5:39 |
| 8. Alcohol (drugs) cause all kinds of issues | Pr 23:29-35 |
| 9. We do things inappropriate | Gen 9:21 |
| 10. Wine is a mocker | Pr 20:1 |
| 11. Do not get drunk | Eph 5:18 |
| 12. Don't make drinking an idol (1 st priority) | Is 5:11 |
| 13. Don't combine drinking with worship | Lev 10:9 |
| 14. Leaders shouldn't drink | Pr 31:4 |
| 15. Shouldn't encourage others to | Hab 2:15 |
| 16. Takes away our judgment | Is 28:7 |
| 17. It's a traitor, allures us with promises | Hab 2:5 |

OA End

Bible Study on - Overeating & Food Addiction

See Victorious Living & Temptation FIRST!

The verses in this list are descriptive of the issue & problem. They are to provide the why, but also, since God would never ask us to do something beyond what we are able they are empowering and can be kept as promises as well. These verses can be used as your self-control thoughts to overcome the tempting thoughts. However they will be more effective after the study on Victorious Living combined with Overcoming in General FIRST.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Overeating is a sin | Deu 21:20 |
| 2. Israel craved rather than grateful | Num 11:32-34 |
| 3. David talking about Israel's cravings | Ps 78:29-30 |
| 4. A problem in Sodom | Eze 16:49 |
| 5. Often combined with ungodliness | 2 Tim 3:1-5 |
| 6. Is a serious problem | Pr 23:2 |
| 7. We are not to destroy the temple | 1 Cor 3:17 |
| 8. Our body is a temple | 1 Cor 6:19 |
| 9. Important in the last days | 1 Peter 4:7 |
| 10. Food not a problem, influence is | 1 Cor 8:7-13 |
| 11. We are influenced by others | Pr 28:7 |

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|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 12. Avoid those who encourage | Pr 23:20-21 |
| 13. Can become an idol | Phil 3:19 |
| 14. We can purpose in our heart | Dan 1:8 |
| 15. Think about being like Christ | Rom 13:14 |

OE End