

FREEDOM STARTS TODAY

The design features three large orange circles: one in the top right, one in the middle right, and a partial one in the bottom right. A horizontal orange bar is positioned below the subtitle text.

Overcoming Struggles
and Addictions
One Day at a Time

JOHN ELMORE

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and Addictions
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BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
www.BakerBooks.com

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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Elmore, John, 1975– author.

Title: Freedom starts today : overcoming struggles and addictions one day at a time / John Elmore.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020024593 | ISBN 9781540900623 (paperback) | ISBN 9781540901446 (casebound)

Subjects: LCSH: Addicts—Religious life—Miscellanea. | Substance abuse—Religious aspects—Christianity—Miscellanea. | Habit breaking—Religious aspects—Christianity—Miscellanea. | Sins—Miscellanea. | Sin—Christianity—Miscellanea. | Spiritual exercises.

Classification: LCC BV4596.A24 E45 2021 | DDC 248.8/629—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020024593>

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21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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This book is dedicated to you,

(Write your name here)

and to the eradication of addiction in the church.

(Submit your information at
freedomstartstoday.org;
I will pray for you.)

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Acknowledgments

WITH LIFELONG GRATITUDE TO:

My Laura—thank you for saying yes. You are Christ’s tangible grace to me. I love walking Home with you.

Hill, Penny, and Judd—you my are proof that God does not treat us as our sins deserve. I’m so proud of you and thankful to be your dad.

Mom, Dad, Matt, and Mandy—thank you for a lifetime of encouragement, your intervening love when life was unraveling, and all the support in the years of rebuilding.

Charlie P.—for holding my hand the first three months of life without alcohol and teaching me the power of daily sobriety by God’s strength.

Keith Chancey and Chad Hampsch—for your discipleship that Jesus used to reshape my heart, mind, and life and for your Hebrews 13:7 lives.

Dr. Scott Horrell—thank you for teaching me with God-honoring passion the glory, work, and roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Dr. Paul Pettit—thank you for discipling me, loving me, and graciously entrusting leadership to this former liability.

Acknowledgments

Rick and Linda Jo Strickland—thank you for loving me in my present and not caring about my past.

Watermark Community Church—thank you for taking a chance on an old drunk made new in Christ and for the years you’ve spent investing in me.

My brothers and sisters of re:generation—you lead the church in surrender unto sanctification, and your lives are pages out of the Gospels. Every Monday you are my Romans 1:12.

The Barnards, Frizzells, Pokludas, and Treadaways—living out the one-anothers of Scriptures with you and our children has been the richest gift.

And to Don Gates of The Gates Group (my incredible advocate and agent), Rebekah Guzman, Amy Ballor, Nicci Jordan Hubert, Abby Van Wormer, Patti Brinks, Melanie Burkhardt, Erin Bartels, Rachel O’Connor, Janelle Wiesen, and the entire Baker Publishing Group team—you all work tirelessly to put into people’s hands the transforming truths of God and do so on a world-class level. It’s an honor to serve with you.

Introduction

I PUT A SHOTGUN TO MY HEAD because I wanted my life to end. I wanted the pain to be over. And I wondered if I could go through with it.

It was September 2005, and I was losing everything, including my sanity. I could feel the darkness around me. Insomnia, mania, nightmares, loss of appetite, risky behavior. I had three doctors tell me I would die if I kept drinking. I thought, *Good. I want to die but don't want to hurt my family by committing suicide. But I hope one morning I just don't wake up.* I drank hard for twelve years straight and was a functional alcoholic. What an ironic justification: “Congrats! You are a total drunk who can hold down a job.”

After the horrific end of a relationship, I became a dysfunctional alcoholic trying to numb the pain. Three months later, on a Wednesday morning, I was drinking with two homeless guys in Austin, Texas. I was so lonely. I told them to come sit with me and I would buy them whatever they wanted. This was a new low for me, and my family knew it. Five hundred dollars and eight hours later, my big brother was on a one-way flight to Austin to put me in my own car and take me to Dallas for a family intervention.

I walked into my first twelve-step recovery meeting five days later. It was the scariest thing I've ever done. But what happened that night, and the things that followed, changed the rest of my life.

I was set free—and that's why I've now written this book for you and others who long for freedom. The principles and practices of this book are what God used to walk me out of an addiction that was killing me. I have personally witnessed porn addicts, same-sex strugglers, sex addicts, alcoholics, drug addicts, codependents, and more be set free by what (or more accurately Who) you'll encounter in this book.

And yet this is *not* a book; it's a daily journey—for you. This isn't a normal book, where you just read what I have written but don't interact with the material. Instead, it contains daily entries for daily freedom from struggles, as well as opportunities to journal, pray, live out what you've learned, and be held accountable throughout. So don't worry—your journey to freedom begins just a couple of pages from here, *not* after reading through this whole book. Freedom starts today.

The principles within are applicable to all sin struggles. Two years ago, while on a date night with my wife, Laura, she said, "I just wish we wouldn't fight anymore for the rest of our lives." In that moment, I thought, *God was powerful enough to free you from alcoholism. Surely He can free you from quarreling with your wife.* So I started employing the practices in this book in my marriage to stop bickering with Laura. Guess what? We got into three arguments that year. If you're married, you *know* that's a miracle. Ever since, we don't fight like we used to (and I'm the only one who changed anything, which implicates me as the main source of the problem). Now I'm asking God to help me stop being short and sharp with my kids when they disobey, and I believe God's power will free me from those harsh moments with my children as well.

Sin is a supernatural problem that demands a supernatural answer. You have no power over sin; God has all power over it. So if you're tired of losing the fight against sin, prepare to no longer be tired. You feel this way because you have been fighting a more powerful foe. This book will help you learn how to bring God into the fight, for as Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

One of the Holy Spirit's main roles (and often most overlooked role) in our lives is to kill sin and make us like Jesus (sanctify us), but we neglect Him. We know and talk a lot about the fruit of the Spirit, the good things He bears in our lives, but we don't talk as much about the "negative work" of the Holy Spirit. This sounds strange, doesn't it? How could anything God does be negative? It's not. The great theologian John Owen, in his book *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, calls the negative work of the Holy Spirit His warring against sin on our behalf. He both produces positive fruit in us and kills the negative sin within us. So, as for this exhausting wrestle with sin? Not anymore. God lives to set His children free; we need only to ask and depend on Him.

To set up this premise of *daily* warring against sin by the Spirit, it's important to know this isn't some new fad or a Christianese life hack to quit sin. This is how the church has always warred against sin, but we have forgotten. This is nothing new, but it will make you new. Martin Luther, the great Reformer who brought the gospel back to the church, wrote his 95 Theses. And the first four, implying they were of utmost importance, centered on repentance. Here are theses 1 and 3: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh."¹ And again, Owen, in

Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, asks of the church, “Do you mortify [sin]; do you make it your daily work; be always at it [while] you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.”² Jonathan Edwards was also grounded on daily repentance, which birthed his list of resolutions—seventy things he willed to do and not do. He would read these weekly to remind himself of advancing the kingdom and subduing the flesh. And God used the application of these bold truths to set the church on fire.

So now it’s your turn to consider what they did: What will you daily ask Him to free you from?

Freedom Starts Today will walk you into freedom from your struggle or addiction in 24 hours, one day at a time, indefinitely. If you go all in, the next ninety days will be life altering, sin destroying, and God glorifying. You see, God said that anyone who has trusted in Christ is no longer a slave to sin. The jail cell has been unlocked and the door is open, but ironically, we stay put. It is familiar; we actually kind of love what we hate. But I know and you know that if you’re reading this, it’s because you’re ready for freedom. And if this freedom-in-Christ thing is actually true, actually lasting, actually available, then you’re listening.

And I would not waste my time or yours if the daily practice and promises in this book weren’t completely true for every single person who trusts in Jesus. Once Jesus did what He did for me fifteen years ago, I decided I would spend the rest of my life telling people that Jesus is real, they’re never too far gone, and He can change everything.

Who This Book Is For: People Struggling with Sin or an Addiction

(By the way, everyone struggles with sin or an addiction. Yes, even your pastor. How do I know? I am a pastor and I know many.)

This book is for the church—because the church is addicted.

Let that sink in. The very body and bride of Christ is addicted. *Every* church has *many* people addicted to porn, pills, control/anxiety, social media, food/body image, work/status/money, self-harm, alcohol, codependency, sexual impurity, and more. But there are many more socially acceptable sins that are just as spiritually lethal: pride, gossip, workaholism, materialism, and others. I believe you are reading this because you want to be free from something in your life. Something you've tried to quit, stop, or get rid of but keeps coming back around. And I have comforting news to quiet some of the shame: so does everyone else. Your mom, your boss, your neighbor, your spouse, your waiter, your pastor, everyone. Everyone has something in their life that shouldn't be there; it's the human condition this side of heaven.

We have ignored addiction for too long because it's too big, too awful, too pervasive, and seemingly too impossible to cure. And if the church doesn't have the antidote to sin, our faith is a joke. But our faith is not a joke, because, in fact, we do have the Antidote, the only antidote to sin. As Jesus becomes more in your life, sin will become less. It is Christ's will to eradicate sin and addiction from the church (Eph. 5:25–27), and He will sanctify His bride, one person at a time, one struggle at a time, one day at a time. This book makes clear and simple the path to freedom from sin struggles by the power of the Holy Spirit in the context of community. This book is not going to unpack the science or theology of addiction; odds are you don't need convincing of the how or why of addiction. I believe you just want to be free. I know I did.

Sin, Satan, and years of defeat have left people believing that God's power isn't potent enough for their personal sin. They may be saved eternally but have resolved that they will have to eke out a life of spiritual defeat against sin in this life. Many are also being told that if they just had enough faith

or hatred for sin, they would be healed and freed. Thus, it is either God's problem or their problem, yet either way, the problem remains.

To that end, this is not a theological, psychological, or bio-medical treatise on sin and addiction; addicts and strugglers don't have time for that. Neither is it a fiery brimstone rebuke; Jesus simply wouldn't have that. This is sin-shattering orthodoxy (right beliefs) translated to life-changing orthopraxy (right living) on every page for every day, because though the war is won, the battles are relentless. You don't need 24 chapters about addiction or inspirational feels; you need to be struggle-free in the next 24 hours. This book focuses on that, because God delivers on His promises. Every. Single. Time.

To say that a book will deliver people from addiction in 24 hours is an alarmingly big and a ridiculously boastful promise, unless it's not about the book. This book lays plain the way of personal appropriation of God's promises offered to each of us in the Scriptures. This is done through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and the healing found in confession to and encouragement by the body of Christ. Make no mistake: there is no power in *Freedom Starts Today*. The power is in God and living out the Scriptural principles and promises of God each day. As you pray in daily surrender, live in daily community, and walk out these ninety promises and truths of God, He alone can and will set you free. We are told in 1 Peter 1:2 that the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier and in Romans 8:13 that the Spirit kills sin. Thus, to live the promised full, abundant, victorious life, we *must* bring Him into the fight—*daily*.

This book leads you on a path of Spirit-empowered daily repentance and mines the Scriptures for divinely grand promises, unpacking them with illustrations to aid in understanding and memory. It also includes journaling space for

a prayer, as well as a daily proactive commitment, by God's strength and with another person, to sobriety from a sin for the next 24 hours. This is not reactive confession of sin after it's already happened. Similar to Jonathan Edwards's resolutions, this is a proactive decision by God's strength not to give in to a particular sin.

Everyone would love not to give in to their struggle for the rest of their lives, but that feels like an impossible Everest. So, don't. Determine to quit for one, singular, infinitely more feasible day. Because while no one could climb Everest in a day, everyone could advance one step. That is all God asks—a daily walk with Him. The strategy and reality of conquering the mountain of sin is by advancing one day at a time (Gal. 5:16). To say it personally, I haven't been sober for fifteen years; I've been sober for 5,475 days. Victory over sin is found one day at a time, and the victory is won by Jesus.

People often ask me about their respective addictions and how to stop. I reply, "If I asked you to quit for the rest of your life, would you be able?" They hang their head in despair or shame and say something like "No. I wish I could, but history would say otherwise." Then I ask what I was asked at my first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: "Well, do you think, by God's strength, you could stay sober for 24 hours?" When I ask that question, the answer is a resounding and eager yes. So, we do just that, together. Surrender, repentance, and accountability win the daily war against sin, and a new life is wrought.

In Christianity, most often (if ever) we confess sin reactively. That is, *after* the sin has already been committed. Reactive confession is good, biblical, and right, but at the same time, the sin has already happened. If you want to overcome addictive behavior, waiting until the behavior has occurred yet again can leave you feeling stuck in a defeating cycle. But what if you both confessed your sin *and* decided to go on the

offensive (the theological term is *repent*, or a turning from sin by turning toward God)? We do this by making a *proactive* decision by God's strength not to do/use/say/go/act upon "xyz" over the next 24 hours. Then, let another person know about your commitment, and plan to follow up with them 24 hours later and let them know if you abstained. Then, when temptation inevitably comes during that period, you remember your commitment that you'll have to follow up with your friend the next day (your resolve is strengthened), you pray more (become dependent on God), you reach out to your brother/sister in Christ for help (they pray and encourage you). After 24 hours, you call or text and tell them if you stayed free from whatever struggle and also make another proactive commitment of 24 hours free from that struggle by God's strength. You follow up again after another 24 hours, commit again, and repeat this daily.

In this way, I've seen so many people freed from addiction, both in our church's recovery program and other programs, like AA. When I was first getting sober, I would remember I'd have to call Charlie the next day and let him know whether or not I stayed sober. That communal aspect of my recovery, knowing I'd be checking in with someone, was pivotal and strengthened my decision not to drink that day.

Traditionally, as people war against sin and fall, they feel "it" didn't work and give up trying. Instead, *Freedom Starts Today* teaches a new way of living: regardless of falling, the answer is daily repentance. It's time recovery circles and rehabs aren't the only places sin is being proactively warred against and struggles being overcome. The church should be leading and winning the war. And if so, the church universal will see healing, transformation, mission-minded members, and deep fellowship flood back into its body through confession, daily repentance, discipleship, biblical community, and a powerful living out of Scripture. This is the will of God. And

He delights to fulfill His will. We need only ask, and we will receive. May it be so.

As such, this is not a book of God's promises; the world has enough of those. Nor is it a daily devotional; same story. This is a practical, immediately applicable methodology of learning to war against sin daily while providing a powerful promise of God or a transforming truth for each day.

I am a recovering alcoholic. I was a drunk for twelve years and now have been sober for fifteen. And this book, this journey, will walk you through the same path of getting free from an addiction that God used to set me free, and that I've seen so many others use. It's simple. It's powerful. It's the gospel. And it's for you.

How to Use This Book: Daily Readings, Daily Prayer Journaling, and Daily Commitments

When you're addicted to or struggling with something, you don't have time to read a three-hundred-page book, you need immediate, effective help. As such, this is not a "read it cover to cover" book. It's a book of daily entries that will take only about ten minutes per day for ninety days in a row. It requires your personal interaction and commitment, and a faithful brother or sister in Christ to journey along with you or it'll be a waste of your time. And this book is not a substitute for what the Bible puts forth as the Christian life; it is a supplement with helpful tracks to run on. As such, in addition to going through this book, be in church weekly, go deep with a small group throughout the week, read the Bible, memorize Scripture, and pray daily—live a life of worship.

How long does it take to break a bad habit? Previous psychology has said twenty-one days. More recent research says sixty-six days. Good news: God says that if we will walk with Him *today*, we will not do the things we don't want to do (Gal.

5:16). That's an incredible promise. Our command is simply to walk with Him one day at a time. Then He gives that crazy, life-altering promise: you won't gratify the desires of the flesh. Walking with Him keeps you from walking back down that regrettable path we all have. Forget hoping for twenty-one or sixty-six days; in Christ, freedom starts today!

Here's how it works and what it entails (10 minutes total each day):

1. **Read** a story based on Scripture that unpacks that spiritual truth (*2 minutes*).
2. **Write** a prayer to God about what you've learned, and ask Him to transform you by the truth you've just read (*2 minutes*).
3. **Pray** and ask God to keep you from your addiction for the next 24 hours *by His strength*. This is key: make sure your commitment to 24-hour sobriety is by *His strength*. Pray in a humble position (arms raised, on your knees, etc.). FYI, I have prayed on my knees with my face to the floor almost every day for the past fifteen years, and I believe it has been so good to humbly begin each day in a position of glad submission before my King. If you're able, I recommend you do the same each day (*2 minutes*).
4. **Text or call** a trusted Christian friend and tell them you've committed to being sober from your struggle/addiction for the next 24 hours, by God's strength, and that you will follow up with them the next day to let them know if you stayed free from it (*1 minute*).
 - That's it. Text or call and say, "Hey, _____, I commit to you, by God's strength, not to _____ for the next 24 hours. And tomorrow at this time, I'll follow up with you to let you know how I did. Will you please pray for me?"

- The next day, at that same time, follow up with your friend and let them know how you did (set an alarm on your phone as a reminder to text your friend). Then commit to them to abstain, by God's strength, from _____ again for another 24 hours.
- And repeat that pattern indefinitely. It's your daily path to freedom—all by God's strength, His Word, and the support of His people.
- Remember, you can't do this alone. As it's been said, illness starts with an *I* and wellness begins with *we*. God has designed the Christian life that no one can get healthy and free and healed alone. To attempt this alone is contrary to the will of God found in James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (NIV).

5. Read the suggested chapter of Scripture, as God's Word promises that it will be sanctifying for you (John 17:17) (*3 minutes*).

Why Do This? Why *Freedom Starts Today*?

Satan has sold you a false bill of goods. You may have trusted in Jesus for eternal salvation but are not experiencing daily salvation—here on this side of eternity, you have succumbed to defeat in one or even a few areas. Satan whispers in a voice that sounds all too much like your own, "This is just your lot in life. It's who you are. If God really loved you, He would have taken away these desires. You've struggled with this for a decade or more, and nothing will ever change. You've asked God to save you from this struggle and He hasn't, which means you don't have enough faith or He doesn't have enough power or concern." The lies are just that: lies. The

truth is, God longs to see you free and set you free. It doesn't matter how long your thing has been your thing; Christ will set you free. He lived, died, and rose again for that truth and for you to live in the reality of that freedom found in Him alone. And this won't be a focus on sin (that doesn't help anything); this is a focus on Christ (who heals everything). It's replacing an addiction of sin with your affection for Him—a growing love of Christ crowding out the lust for sin.

Don't believe the lies another day. Christ has better for you. He freed me from what I couldn't free myself from. *This isn't* a self-help book, power-of-positive-thinking garbage, or how to do something by new habits and previously untapped willpower. *This is* personally appropriating the power and promises of God and infusing them into your daily life. You walk with God, and God does the work. Period. There is no other way.

These bold claims you've read are straight from Scripture. They're not ripped out of context. It's not prosperity gospel. It's not spiritual psychobabble. It's the true gospel, founded on the Holy Scriptures, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and lived out with the body of Christ.

This is about a proactive, daily decision to war against sin, based on the power of God and the encouragement of God's people. Proactive. Power. People. That's what God will use to set you free. Aren't you ready to be free?

Pick a Fight and a Person

Some people think they don't really have a struggle. That's just a lack of self-awareness. We all have our ditches, our things we run to or fall prey to when life's pressures and pleasures are calling.

So, pray this: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous

way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps. 139:23–24). Pray and ask God which struggle He would have you war against first.

Really, stop and pray. Ask Him.

Then prepare yourself for battle.

And if you fall, fall forward, kneeling in confession of sin. Ask God to give you freedom one day at a time (one hour at a time, if necessary) in surrender to your Master and in humble thanksgiving, being certain that He isn’t mad at you, He loves you, and He longs to walk with you daily.

For the righteous falls seven times and rises again. (Prov. 24:16)

Now that you’ve chosen which struggle to war against, you need to pick a person to journey with. Choose someone of the same gender who is a faithful Christ-follower (ideally from your home church). And don’t bounce around from person to person; prayerfully choose someone and go deep.

And now, let’s begin. One day at a time. And may the war against sin start today. As you read, each day’s entry will have a powerful promise or transformational truth from God to you. These aren’t just general truths; they are true for *you*. Remember this:

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Cor. 1:20)

THE END

(of warring against sin
by your own strength and losing)

Then he said to me, “This is what the LORD says . . . :
It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit,
says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. . . .
Do not despise these small beginnings,
for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.”
(Zech. 4:6, 10 NLT)



DAILY ENTRIES



DAY 1

Sober 24 Hours

The nature of Christ's salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day "evangelist." He announces a Saviour from Hell rather than a Saviour from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the Lake of fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness.

A. W. Pink

CHARLIE P., MY AA SPONSOR, asked me a question the first night I met him that changed the rest of my life. This question has shaped the way I help other strugglers and addicts. He asked me if I could stay sober from alcohol for one day with God's strength. I told him I needed serious help; I didn't need one day of sobriety. In the past, I'd been sober for a weekend, a week, and one time even a month. I needed real help, not some stupid 24-hour commitment. But I finally gave in. I committed by God's strength not to drink for 24 hours. I knelt beside the couch I was living on and begged God to help me. I checked in with Charlie the next day, still telling him I needed something more. He persisted and I relented. Another 24 hours. Then seven days in a row. Then a month. Then three months. I was feeling seriously free. And now it's been fifteen years. I don't call Charlie every day anymore,

but I'm still every bit as dependent daily on God. I still kneel and surrender every single day to the Lord. Something about being in that position of humility and asking Him to lead my day puts things in the right perspective and helps me see that He is a really good Lord of my life (and I am not).

In *The Magician's Nephew*, one of the books in C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the children are wondering if Aslan would not have realized they would need food for their journey. "Wouldn't he know without being asked?" said Polly. 'I've no doubt he would,' said the Horse (still with his mouth full). 'But I've a sort of an idea he likes to be asked.'¹ In much the same way, does God know that you need to be freed from your addiction and struggle? Absolutely. Does it honor Him and keep you in daily dependence to ask Him every day? Absolutely, all the more. And so we do.

Now it's your turn; it's day one of your journey.

So I'll ask you what Charlie asked me on December 27, 2005:

Would you, by God's strength, commit to not
_____ for the next 24 hours?

_____ (Yes or No)

This daily dependence on God for freedom is from Matthew 6:33–34:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Write a prayer below asking God to help you keep from your struggle today and thanking Him for his power and righteousness.

In a position of humility, pray and ask God to keep you from your struggle for the next 24 hours.

Text or call a brother or sister in Christ to let them know you're committing, by God's strength, to staying free from your struggle/addiction for the next 24 hours and you'll follow up with them tomorrow to let them know if you did.

Example text: "I'm committing to you, by God's strength, that I won't look at porn for the next 24 hours. And I'll follow up with you at this time tomorrow and let you know if I stayed free."

Once you have done so, initial here: _____ Date: _____

» **SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 6**

DAY 2

The Power of a Penny

None can become fit for the future life, who hath not practiced himself for it now.

St. Augustine

IT'S EASY TO THINK PENNIES don't matter. They are free for the taking at some cash registers to help make change. People don't even pick up pennies when they see them lying on the ground. They're negligible and seen as almost worthless. Yet no matter who the richest person in the US is or ever will be, their wealth, if you broke it down, would be amassed of single cents. The billionaire, in a very real sense, just has tons of pennies. Ironic, isn't it? One penny is seen as borderline worthless. But an accumulation of them could be a fortune.

Struggles and addictions can feel like this. One day of freedom or sobriety? So what? That's not worth much. But just as a rich person's wealth is made of single cents, a lifetime of freedom is made up of single days. Two things about my sobriety: First, as I said earlier, I'm not fifteen years sober from alcoholism; I'm 5,475 days sober. My sobriety has come one single day at a time and so will yours. There is no other way. But that's good news. I'm not asking you to stay sober for a thousand days in a row—just one day, by God's strength. Second, sometimes when people ask, "How long have you been sober?" I say, "Well, it's almost 2:00 p.m., so I've been sober about eight hours." Meaning, all that matters is that I'm sober today, walking with God today, and not starting

to place confidence in years of sobriety from alcohol. That's dangerous.

But there are three more things I want to point out about the penny:

1. You will find the phrase "In God we trust" across the top. Amen. We will be victorious over our struggle by trusting in God; it's in Him that we trust.
2. The word *Liberty* is on the front. How incredible. It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.
3. Abraham Lincoln, the emancipator of the slaves, is pictured. We, too, have an emancipator, as we were once slaves to sin and Satan—Jesus, the one who sets the slaves free.

So find a penny and stick it in your pocket as a reminder that this journey is one day at a time. It's in God that we trust, not our own strength, attempts, or righteousness. He offered His life to give us freedom. And He is risen victorious over sin, death, and Satan, as the one who set the slaves free.

This transformational truth is found in Galatians 5:1.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Write a prayer below thanking God for the freedom Christ has for you and that today, by His strength, you will walk in that freedom.

In a position of humility, pray and ask God to keep you from your struggle for the next 24 hours.

Text or call a brother or sister in Christ to let them know if you've stayed free from your struggle for the *past* 24 hours. Tell them you're also committing, by God's strength, to staying free from your struggle/addiction for the *next* 24 hours and you'll follow up with them tomorrow to let them know if you did.

Once you have done so, initial here: _____ Date: _____

» **SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 5**

DAY 3

Cash the Check

Praying in faith comes from an abiding faith in the Person prayed to—the confidence is in Him. It is based on a knowledge of who He is, and on a trusted conviction that He is worthy to be trusted. Praying in faith is the act of a simple-hearted child of God.

Corrie ten Boom

CHECKS ARE FUNNY THINGS. The paper itself isn't worth a penny. But what's written on it can be incredibly valuable. A check is a signed document that orders that a person be

paid the amount in full when deposited or cashed. I want to tell you about two checks I've written to two people I love.

After our third baby was born, Tim, a friend who's in construction, did some work on our house to convert the back patio into a playroom. In his crazy gospel generosity, he said if we would pay for the materials, he would give us the labor. I'll never forget his kindness. The project took a few months, and when it was completed, I cut the last check, which wasn't a small amount, at least not to us. As time went by and I monitored our bank account, I always had much more than I thought I would. But I would look and see that my friend hadn't deposited the check yet. After two months, I texted my buddy and said, "Our final check hasn't cleared. Would you let me know if you need another one or could you deposit it soon?" He wrote back, "Found it my bag. Thank you. Much needed, so thank you. Depositing now."

The second check was to a young, single mom who my wife and I really love but hadn't seen in years. I bumped into her while she was waiting tables at a restaurant. I wrote her a check and said, "I'm proud of you for raising that little one. I know being a single mom is so hard. You're a hero to us. This is for you and your baby and whatever you need. It's not a ton, but I hope it helps, and our church can help you more with whatever you need." I gave her that check more than a year ago, and it still hasn't been cashed. Maybe she lost it. Maybe she didn't feel like she needed a handout. Maybe it was the fact that she's juggling a hundred pressing things all by herself with a baby and just lost track of it. I hope I run into her sometime soon so we can try again.

So why the story of two checks? Both people needed the money. And both were holding in their hands the very thing that would bring help and relief. One deposited the check and immediately received what was promised. The other

received nothing, though she held in her hands the very thing she needed.

If you own a Bible, you hold in your hands a series of checks made out to you as a Christian, signed by God Himself. But like one of my two friends, you must personally believe that the promise is for you and receive it. Believe and receive. This is called *appropriation of a promise*: to personally claim or lay hold of in faith what God has promised for His children. This does not mean you get to claim every Old Testament promise to Israel—those are not for you. But in the New Testament (and even in some of the Old), there are promises, **BIG PROMISES**, for His children. For you. But you must cash the check, so to say. This book is full of ninety promises for you to personally appropriate, to live in, to believe and receive. So start cashing God’s checks. And P.S., they aren’t financial; even better, they’re eternal.

This transformational truth is found in Romans 4:20–22.

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”

Write your prayer below telling God that you believe in Him and His promises for you and that you are fully convinced God will come through on what He promises for His children.

In a position of humility, pray and ask God to keep you from your struggle for the next 24 hours.

Text or call a brother or sister in Christ to let them know if you've stayed free from your struggle for the *past* 24 hours. Tell them you're also committing, by God's strength, to staying free from your struggle/addiction for the *next* 24 hours and you'll follow up with them tomorrow to let them know if you did.

Once you have done so, initial here: _____ Date: _____

» **SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 4**

DAY 4

A Vital Decision

All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I can contribute to my own redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.

William Temple

WHEN AN EMT ARRIVES at the scene of an accident, they always check one thing first: vitals. They must ascertain before rendering aid whether the person is dead or alive, despite all the other presenting injuries. It doesn't matter if the person's leg has a compound fracture. It doesn't matter how much blood there is. What good would it be to set and splint a broken leg on a dead person? Or try to stop the bleeding of a person who's already passed? Conversely, how unproductive would it be to start giving chest compressions