

# Overcoming Habitual Sin

Joel 2:12-18  
Psalm 51  
2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Coffee is one of the most common addictions today. If you don't know yet if you're love for coffee has become an addiction, let me help you. You're addicted to coffee if—

- ✓ You grind your coffee beans in your mouth.
- ✓ You don't sweat, you percolate.
- ✓ You walk twenty miles on your treadmill before you realize it's not plugged in.
- ✓ You have a picture of your coffee mug *on* your coffee mug.
- ✓ You soak your dentures in coffee overnight.
- ✓ You haven't blinked yet during my sermon.

While it may not be coffee, all of us are addicted to something. Sometimes our addictions are pretty obvious to other people and noticeably destructive to ourselves and others, like alcoholism, drug addiction, cutting, gambling, anorexia, and addiction to prescription medications. However, sometimes our addictions are more hidden and secret, like sex, shoplifting, bulimia and pornography. For many people, our addictions include things that are socially acceptable, like coffee, soda, chocolate, exercise, and shopping. For some people, the addiction includes things that are actually approved of and promoted by society. The psychiatrist and spiritual writer, Gerald May, describes his socially-approved addictions as “work, performance, responsibility, intimacy, being liked, [and] helping others.”<sup>1</sup> While the details of our addictions will vary from person-to-person, the fact remains—we are all addicts; we are all attached to something.

The season of Lent is a season of *detachment*. Through various disciplines—especially prayer, fasting, and abstinence—we seek to detach ourselves from our addictions in order to live more fully in the freedom that Jesus Christ won for us. While we sometimes experience such detachment during Lent, the fact of the matter is, we often find that the disciplines of Lent *fail* to be the remedy for our attachments and addictions. Lent sometimes becomes, then, just another failed attempt to overcome attachments and addictions. We are left feeling emotionally spent and spiritually empty.

Our addictions cause us to experience the same pattern, namely—we willfully fight against our addiction using a new “remedy” that we’re placing a lot of hope in, and we fail. When we fail, we tend to fail big. This leads to a period of not caring... of giving up. This then leads to tremendous despair, hopelessness, depression, loneliness and feelings of being worthless. Eventually, we willfully choose to quit the addiction by turning to another potential remedy, and the cycle begins again.

For the next few weeks, we are going to explore the dynamics of attachments and addictions and look at how to overcome them. Our celebration of Ash Wednesday is an important reminder of the first step in overcoming habitual sin—**humility**. During the Ash Wednesday celebration, ashes are smeared on our foreheads in the form of a cross. The ashes, *as well as our addictions and attachments*, remind us that God is God and we are not; He is perfect

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<sup>1</sup> May, Gerald G. Addiction and Grace. Harper Collins, 1988, pg. 9.

and we are not; He is the *source* of grace and we are the *recipients* of grace. If we have forgotten this important reality, the words that are spoken as the ashes are smeared on our foreheads remind us again, “You are dust and to dust you will return.” Additionally, the ashes are smeared in the *form of a cross*, which reminds us that we should not trust in ourselves or our own willpower, but rather, in Christ’s grace, forgiveness, healing and salvation.

As we begin Lent, I invite us to spend the next few days reflecting on the gift of *humility*. This will set the stage for the upcoming sermons on “overcoming habitual sin” and prepare our hearts for the grace that God is offering us. I’m including some prayer exercises below that will help us to reflect on the addictions in our lives, as well as the importance of humility.

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Name your most significant attachments/addictions.
- ✚ Buddhism has four important tenets—1) life involves suffering, 2) suffering is a consequence of attachment, 3) *detachment* leads us to freedom from suffering, and 4) the only path to freedom is one that includes every aspect of our life in a profoundly spiritual way. Do these tenets seem true in your life and in your experience of attachments/addictions and suffering? How do you see humility fitting into the fourth tenet listed above?
- ✚ Read Philippians 2:1-11. What specifically does it teach us about the gift of humility? Share your thoughts with God.