

"If you are ready to finally break free, grab this book and let the healing begin."

CRAIG GROESCHEL, pastor of Life.Church



RESTORE

break out
of your past
and into
God's future

VINCE ANTONUCCI

Praise for *Restore*

I like to visit prisons, hospitals, and recovery centers—it is there that the truth is evident and people are without pretense; attention is given and change occurs. While you may never get to go to rehab, in *Restore*, Vince will take you there. In his book, Vince gives you care and concern and gracefully coaches you toward honesty and action. If you are ready to face your issues and knock them down, then read *Restore* and your life will be changed.

KYLE IDLEMAN

Pastor; author of *Not a Fan* and *Grace Is Greater*

Vince Antonucci is a talented writer and dedicated leader who has helped so many on the road to healing. *Restore* shows a clear path to overcome the baggage in your life and live free. Such an excellent tool!

JUD WILHITE

Senior pastor of Central Church; author of *Pursued*

I love this book and believe it will lead you and those you love to freedom from issues that keep you in bondage to the past. Vince has not only experienced this in his own life, but he has a front-row seat to watch God set people free daily through his ministry in Las Vegas.

GENE APPEL

Senior pastor of Eastside Christian Church, Anaheim, CA

Restore can be summed up in five words: “You can’t . . . but God can.” Of course, the value of those five words takes many more words to unpack and process, as Vince does, convincingly, through the lens of going to spiritual rehab. There’s a lot we can’t do when it comes to our seen and unseen addictions, but there is nothing God can’t do when we have the courage to partner with God to confront

them. No matter where you're at or what you're going through, pick up the book, start your journey to healing by reading it, and let God take care of the rest, chapter by chapter. You won't be disappointed.

RUSTY GEORGE

*Author of *When You, Then God**

Vince has written a fantastic book that helps people break out of the junk that puts them in chains. It's biblical, practical, and will make you laugh! I loved it and think it will help anyone trying to deal with the junk in their past so they can move forward.

BOB ROBERTS

*Senior pastor of Northwood Church; author of *Lessons from the East**

Most people have an addiction in one way or another. Those who recognize it and work it through are some of the most genuinely happy, fulfilled, and unstuck people I know. Read this book!

LEON FONTAINE

*CEO of Miracle Channel; author of *The Spirit Contemporary Life**

If you feel stuck . . . if you have hurts you can't get free from, self-destructive habits you can't get past, read *Restore*. Vince will make you laugh, cry, and most important, learn how to move past your past!

JOHN BURKE

*Author of *No Perfect People Allowed**

Tired of those secret layers of your life that deter you from being all God wants you to be? Vince Antonucci's six-step process peels away the layers and leads you along the road to restoration. Vince shares his personal journey along with biblical truth, allowing you to no longer be defined by your past.

DAVE STONE

Pastor of Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, KY

Restore



RESTORE

break out of your past and into God's future

VINCE ANTONUCCI

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REHAB . . . FOR THE REST OF US

I SHOWED UP FOR my first sex addiction group session with everything I thought I would need: a Bible, a notebook, and a pen.

There was, however, one thing I *didn't* have: a sex addiction.

My Friends' Common Element

I have a friend who started partying in high school. In college he turned to cocaine, and, as it will, the cocaine turned on him. It moved from a party companion on the weekends to his master. He was its slave. But today you wouldn't know it. He hasn't done drugs in years and is a healthy, well-adjusted guy. What happened to him? Rehab.

I have another friend who developed a massive gambling addiction. I'm not talking about losing a few bucks at the weekly guys'-night poker game. I'm talking about owing *millions* to Vegas casinos and bookies and the Mexican mafia. I'm talking about using all his friends for their money and having people threaten to kill him. But he hasn't gambled in years. In fact, he's one of the most stable, reliable guys I know. What happened to him? Rehab.

I know someone else who grew up hearing comments from her mother about watching her weight, that boys don't like chunky girls. Over time she went from hearing those comments to being held hostage by them. Years of bulimia followed. She felt horrible about

it and about herself, but she couldn't stop. She tried, but it seemed beyond her control. Today? You guessed it: no more eating disorder. What happened to her? Yeah, *rehab*.

But I've left out an essential part of their stories. It's actually the *most* essential part. The equation that led to their finding wholeness looked like this: God + Rehab = Healing.

They would all tell you they couldn't have done it without God. But they'd also confess that knowing God wasn't enough. They believed in God before becoming addicted, throughout their addictions, and during their failed attempts to change.

It wasn't until they learned and applied the principles God gives us as a path to healing that they moved out of their addictions and toward wholeness—that they finally broke out of their past and into God's future.

Restore

Those friends of mine were *restored*.

What do I mean by restored?

To be restored is to be brought back to the right *place*. Think of a runaway teenager returning to the loving home of his family. He's restored.

To be restored is to be brought back to the right *condition*. Think of a classic car someone is lovingly repairing so it's like new again. It's being restored.

What is it that you and I are really longing for? I believe it's restoration.

We know we're not where we need to be in relation to God. There's distance between us. It may be that we ran away in a full rebellious sprint, or it may be that we unintentionally drift away on a daily basis.

We know we're not where we need to be in our lives. None of us grew up thinking, *I hope someday I'm overweight and not really doing anything about it*, or *I'd like to grow up to be a bitter, unforgiving person*, or *I want to live with a victim mentality so I always blame other people*

for my problems and never move forward, or Someday I want to be in a marriage that's devoid of passion.

We know we're not where we should be with God or with who we are, and what we desire is to be restored.

It's a theme throughout the Bible. The psalmists cry out, "How long, O LORD, until you restore me?";¹ "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you";² "I have suffered much, O LORD; restore my life again as you promised."³ The prophets plead with God, "Turn me again to you and restore me, for you alone are the LORD my God";⁴ "Restore us, O LORD, and bring us back to you again!"⁵ The apostle Paul names it as the goal: "Your restoration is what we pray for" and "Aim for restoration."⁶

It's what we need. The good news is that it's what God is offering.

God promises to restore us. He says, "I will restore them because of my compassion" and "I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners."⁷

The question is *how*? How do we experience God's restoration? It's something God has to do, but we have a part to play. So what is our part? Are we doing what we need to become recipients of restoration? Why doesn't everyone experience it? And, much more personally, why aren't *you* experiencing it?

My Other Friends' Missing Element

That brings me to some of my other friends. Actually, *lots* of my other friends.

I know someone who shops and shops and shops. She doesn't shop for things she needs; she just needs to shop. She keeps buying more clothes, more shoes, and more jewelry, and she hates herself for it every time she receives a credit card bill. She can't stop shopping, because no matter how hard she tries, she can't spend her way out of an emotional hole.

I have another friend who keeps moving. Every two years he packs up his family and heads off to the next place. Ask me, and I'll tell

you he's running. Ask him, and he won't be able to tell you what he's running from.

I have friends who want to exercise but can't seem to start and friends who don't want to smoke but can't seem to stop.

I know people who have a constant, desperate need to please their parents and others who are desperate to stop yelling at their kids.

I have a buddy who wants to be a professional musician but always finds a way to sabotage his own efforts and another buddy who sabotages every romantic relationship that has real potential.

I have friends who struggle to maintain a job because they can't stop playing video games and others who are so addicted to their jobs, they can't find time to play a game with their kids.

And all these people I'm talking about believe in God. The issue *isn't* that they lack faith.

So why can't they do what they want or stop doing what they don't want? What's the missing element for them?

Rehab.

My Rehab

My problem was that I couldn't forgive my father. Growing up, I hated him. He was an abusive bully. He launched his demeaning words like heart-seeking missiles, intended to do maximum damage. Occasionally his hands became weapons as well. He punched holes in walls to show his disgust with me. Even as a little kid I suspected that when he wasn't home, he was probably with women who weren't my mother.

When I was eleven, he walked out on us altogether. Later in life I learned it was actually a pattern; before us he had abandoned two other families.

My dad spent most of his life in and out of jail. When he wasn't imprisoned, he would occasionally pop into my life, usually to borrow money to fund his gambling addiction or some scheme he was working on.

When I received the phone call that he had died of a heart attack,

the only emotion I felt was relief. Sure, it meant I would never get back the thousands of dollars he owed me, but it also meant I'd never have to see him again.

I was constantly angry because of him. I walked through life simmering. I knew I wasn't healthy and my relationships weren't healthy, but what could I do? One of only two people who were supposed to love me had chosen to hate me. He was supposed to comfort and care for me but had tyrannized me. Of course I was going to be a toxic mess. Of course I would always despise him.

There was only one problem.

I became a Christian.

I was a Christian who loved my heavenly Father but still hated my earthly one.

That would have been fine with me, except I kept running into verses in the Bible like these:

- “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”⁸
- “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”⁹
- “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”¹⁰

I wanted to go Edward Scissorhands on the pages with those verses, but I couldn't. I had submitted my life to God's authority. I wanted to obey him.

So I decided to forgive my dad. I even said it out loud.

The only problem was that I *didn't*. I don't know if I was lying to God or myself or if I wasn't really lying at all; I just know I didn't forgive him. I still hated him.

A few years later I became a pastor and started teaching people about God's love, while I continued to have revenge fantasies in which I would find ways to hurt my father the way he had hurt me.

I wanted to forgive him; I just didn't know how.

Then I had my first kid. Suddenly, living as a bubbling cauldron of bitterness became a more pressing issue. How would it affect my ability to love, and have compassion for my children?

That's when two of my friends told me about this program for people with sex issues and addictions. They had both gone and said it was perfect for me. I told them that while I had a buffet of issues, sex addiction wasn't one of them. They explained that sexual issues for many people can be traced back to problems with their fathers. The program helped people learn how to forgive their fathers.

Hmmmmm.

The idea of going to a support group for people with sexual issues didn't appeal to me, but I realized that there *wasn't* a support group for people who couldn't forgive their fathers, and I *needed* to forgive my father. So I went.

The facility the support group was held in was about a mile from the church where I was pastor. I was pretty nervous walking in the first night, wondering, *Will anyone driving by see me? What will they assume?*

I also felt uncomfortable when the group I had been assigned to sat in a circle and everyone was asked to introduce themselves and why they had come.

"Hi, I'm Jim. I can't stop looking at porn. Even at work, I look at porn all day."

"Hi, I'm Russ. I use women for one-night stands. I often will have sex with two or three strangers in the same day."

"Hi, I'm Jeremy. I'm married, and my wife doesn't know this, but I'm also attracted to men and have had sexual encounters with them."

My turn. "Hey, guys. I'm Vince. Um, I haven't forgiven my father." (Questioning looks.) "That's it." (Continued questioning looks.) "No, really, that's it." (#Awkward.)

But I kept going. I went every week for twenty-seven weeks. I did the homework. I read the books. I completed the assignments. And by the end of the program, I had forgiven my father. For real this time.

It was powerful. It set me free. And it changed my life. It's now sixteen years later, and I've been bitter-free ever since.

I mentioned earlier that God promises to restore us. I undersold it—God's promise is even better. If God promised *just* to restore us, it would mean that he could help us make our lives what they always should have been. That's great, but there's still the sadness of the life we lost. But check out what God says in Joel 2:25: "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten" (NKJV).

Locusts had invaded Israel and ruined years of crops. The fields of the farmers were in seeming disrepair. Yet God promised not only to return the fields to their intended condition, but also to supply what was lost in the wasted years.

That's what I've experienced. I ruined years of my life on bitterness. My heart was bitter and seemingly beyond repair. But God not only changed my heart; he also restored the years I lost, stuck in my unforgiveness. Finally I broke out of the dysfunction of my past and into the freedom of God's future for me.

Why?

By myself, I couldn't do it.

With God, I still couldn't seem to do it.

But God + rehab: *boom*.

Your Rehab

I don't know what you're struggling with. I don't know what you've tried. But my guess is that your problem probably isn't considered "serious" enough for there to be a rehab center or twelve-step program for it.

I'm now a pastor of a church in Las Vegas, just off the Strip. All kinds of ordinary people with all kinds of ordinary problems show up every week. What I've experienced, and what I've witnessed others find, is a God-centric path to healing that happens when we apply

the biblical principles people learn in rehab and support groups. In fact, for the past seven years, we've been offering a core course at my church and this past year launched a ministry dedicated to teaching people the principles of recovery so they can move past their past, heal the hurts and self-destructive habits that keep them from freedom, and experience truly changed lives.

I'm guessing that's what you need as well. That's why you're reading this. You don't need a path to healing and wholeness based on *self*-help, or pumping up your *self*-esteem, or developing your *self*-control. You've tried that. You already know that doesn't work. That's why this path isn't centered on *self* at all; it's *God* centric. It's based on the most powerful healing force in the universe: the unconditional love of God.

This path also isn't about behavior modification. Our tendency is to make resolutions and set goals and try to muster up the willpower to start doing what we haven't been doing or to stop doing what we have. We've all tried that, and we know it doesn't work. Our willpower quickly loses power. Not only does it not work, it's not God's way. Jesus chastised the religious leaders of his day, the Pharisees, for focusing on externals. It's *not* about modifying our behavior. God's path is one of healing and experiencing transformation from the inside out.

Reading this book will put you on the path you'd learn about in rehab.

The best way for this book to effectively take you through recovery and toward freedom is if you read, process, and seek to apply one chapter at a time, one day at a time. You don't go through a rehab program in a day. Programs may be as short as a week but are often thirty days. So let this book take you on a deep journey of recovery. In fact, that's why the book has exactly thirty chapters, so you can read, pray about, talk to a friend about, and apply one chapter a day.

On that "talk to a friend" part: What if you read this book in community? Get a friend or a group of friends to read it with. One of the steps in the restoration process is "I stay connected to God and others." By reading this book with a friend, or a group of friends,

you'll already be putting that principle into practice. It will also probably make the journey more fun, and I can basically guarantee that having people to talk to, be encouraged by, and keep you accountable will make the results more powerful.

We've created a digital community at TheRestoreCommunity.com for you to connect with other readers and find helpful resources to discuss this book with a friend or group. On the website you will find more than thirty videos that correspond to each chapter in the book as well as a downloadable journal and guide. All of this is completely free.

As you journey through this book, you're going to encounter drugged-out rats, explosive diapers, secrets I never thought I'd share with anyone, the truth about why you put what you put on social media, how I've mistaken prophets for bullfrogs and theologians for root-beer inventors, the time I almost drowned my wife and then she almost drowned me, and a woman who did not get off her toilet for two years.

You're also going to read some silly top ten lists. The journey to a restored life involves some deep soul searching, and it can be painful, so a few laughs along the way might be nice.

Most of all, you're going to discover how to turn to an extraordinary God to find healing for your ordinary problems and how having his transforming love poured into you on a daily basis can set you free and empower you to live the abundant life Jesus promised.

My guess? You'll never be the same.

THE TOP TEN LEAST POPULAR SELF-HELP BOOKS

10. *Box It Up: Why Feelings Are Stupid*
9. *Who Moved My Colostomy Bag?*
8. *Windows XP for Beginners*
7. *Your Marriage Can Be 3% Better*
6. *How to Make the Best of Your Below-Average Looks*
5. *The 7 Habits of Socially Unaware People*
4. *Glory Days: It's Not What's Ahead; It's What's Behind!*
3. *How to Instagram the Life You've Always Wanted*
2. *Making Toast for Dummies*
1. *How to Win at ATMs*

OUR PROBLEM

I don't like to talk about it.

But I know it.

Honestly, I don't even like to admit it to myself.

But I'm pretty sure it's true of you, too.

In fact, "it" has got all of us.

What is "it"?

It's our problem.

We're unique and different in all kinds of ways,

but when it comes to our problem . . .

we're all the same.

DAY I

THE BLOWOUT

I WAS A FIRST-TIME FATHER. That's my justification for the pee-soaked carpet, my pee-soaked clothes, my pee-soaked hair. Even for the poop on the ceiling.* My wife was out and had left me to care for our baby. Dawson was a couple of months old, and I figured, *How hard can this be?* I told myself, *Men have been taking care of babies when their wives are out for centuries. In fact, men much more irresponsible than somewhat-responsible me have been taking care of babies for centuries.* I was confident. I was ready.

Then Dawson had a blowout.

Let's make sure we have a common definition. A blowout is when a baby goes "number two" with such volume and force that his or her diaper cannot contain it.†

* I'm not really sure if there was poop on the ceiling. I do think there *might* have been poop on the ceiling—and in this book, I'm not covering up anything.

† Think Mount Vesuvius but more sudden—and *much* grosser. And instead of destroying an Italian city, a blowout destroys the parents' spirit (and anything it touches).

Dawson had a blowout, and I thought, *I can handle this. After all, babies have been having blowouts for centuries.**

So I began the biohazard cleanup. Taking off Dawson's diaper was relatively easy. The trick was getting his clothes (which had number two on them) over his head without getting any number two *on* his head. I was accomplishing this with a surgeon's steady hand when it started to rain. I found that surprising since we were indoors in my living room. That's when I realized Dawson was going number one, and I hadn't yet put a new diaper on him. Unprepared for that kind of precipitation, I did what any resourceful young father would do: I cupped my hands and caught the number one. Unfortunately, my hands quickly filled, and number one started going wherever number one wanted to go.[†]

About two minutes later I called my wife. "Here is the situation," I told her. "I am in my underwear. Your son is naked. There is number one *and* number two *everywhere*. What should I do?"

She asked, "Do you want me to come home?"

I thought, *Of course I want you to come home!*

But I *said*, "Of course I don't want you to come home. I can do this. But what should I do first?"

If we're going to walk the path of recovery, the first thing we have to do is admit we have a problem.

The truth is, we've all had a blowout. We're all a mess.

The issue is that we don't see it. Or we won't admit it. And that's what keeps us sick.

A problem denied can destroy you. A problem hidden cannot be healed.

Twelve-steppers have a saying: "You're only as sick as your secrets." Let me tell you a secret—they're right.

* For inspiration, I tried to picture a father having to clean up his baby in the Elizabethan era, wearing a powdered wig and being all, "Thou blowest out thy diaper. Methinks thou hast wrought a plague upon our house!"

† I guess number one is called number one for a reason. I can say that, for me, after this day, I no longer question my son's authority.

The Same As It Ever Was

In the story of the first humans in the Bible, the sequence of events is kind of stunning:

God creates Adam.

God puts Adam in a perfect garden paradise.

God tells Adam he can enjoy everything in the world except for the fruit of one tree.

Adam is alone.

God creates a naked wife for Adam.

Adam and Eve get to run around naked and tend to the garden naked and play naked volleyball.

Then they hear a deceptive whisper: “This isn’t the good stuff. God is holding out on you.”

Somehow Adam and Eve buy the lie that having a perfect relationship with God and playing naked volleyball with each other is not that great—that things could be better if they ate from the tree God told them not to eat from. And so they eat the fruit of the forbidden tree.

Adam and Eve have a blowout. They mess up.

And what is their response? They go into cleanup mode. They hide from God and hope they can keep their mess concealed.

It turns out living in denial doesn’t exactly work for Adam and Eve. Soon they’re no longer naked, no longer living in the garden paradise, and their firstborn son commits the world’s first murder.

Even God’s Favorite?

I don’t know if God plays favorites. It kind of seems like he wouldn’t. But if you read the Bible, it seems like he does. It seems like this guy named David is right at the top of God’s list of favorite people.

Who is David?

He is a man who loves God a lot. And yet one of the stories from his life has another stunning sequence of events:

David is standing on his roof.

He sees a naked woman named Bathsheba, who is taking a bath on another roof.*

He sends his men to bring her to him.

He has sex with her.

She gets pregnant.

David, not wanting anyone to know he's the father, tries to get her husband to sleep with her.

When her husband doesn't take the bait, David has him killed.

David has a blowout. He messes up, to say the least.

And his response is to go into cleanup mode. Not only does he try to hide his sin from God and others; he keeps living as if nothing had happened.

Does living in denial work for David? He later wrote, "When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."¹

David was as sick as his secret.

Not Me!

The thing about you and me is that while we may not eat forbidden fruit or look at naked people from rooftops, just like Adam and Eve and David, we've blown it. We've had our blowouts. We've messed up.

Actually, let's be honest. It's worse than that.

I recently had to go to a hardware store. I hate going to the hardware store and only do it about once every decade or two. I hate it because I am not handy. That's an understatement. I can't fix *anything* around the house. I have friends for that. I have a wife for that. That may sound bad, but I'm pretty good at writing sermons. And if my friends or wife ever needed me to write one for them, I would do it. What I need from them is to fix the broken drawer, or figure out how

* The fact that Bathsheba was taking a bath makes me very happy. If she had a sister named Showersheba who took showers, my life would be complete.

to put together the new lamp, or change the battery in the smoke detector. Seems to me it's a fair exchange.[†]

So I hate going to the hardware store.

The reason I went to the hardware store is because I needed some way to chain up my dog, Kuma, in my backyard.[‡] We have a fence around our backyard because we want Kuma to be able to enjoy the freedom of running around outside without the danger of him getting lost or of a car running over him. But Kuma finally realized he can squeeze between the bars of our backyard fence.

One day I heard him out back barking frantically, so I went out and saw that he was stuck halfway through the fence. He looked up and noticed me, which somehow gave him the motivation he needed to push himself the rest of the way out. Suddenly, he was free, and he gleefully ran around the neighborhood until I finally caught him and brought him back inside.

Later, I let him out again, and he squeezed through the bars again. When I finally found him, I decided not to let him into the backyard anymore. That's when the real trouble started. Now that Kuma has tasted running around outside of the backyard, it's all he can think about. He's constantly at the back door barking. When I won't let him out, he'll come over and sit next to me like we're best friends, then return to the back door and bark. He's trying to create a codependent relationship! He thinks he can manipulate me into enabling his dysfunction! He will do *anything* to escape the boundaries I've set for him.

Here's the deal for you and me: God set boundaries around our behavior because he loves us and wants to protect us from doing things that can get us lost or hurt. But when we go outside God's boundaries, we discover that sinning can be pretty fun.

Most preachers don't mention that because, well, we don't want to feel like we're promoting sin. But we all know it's true. If there were

[†] Well, it will be if they ever need a sermon. No one has asked me to write them a sermon yet. But I'm ready!

[‡] Normally such man's work would be my wife's job, but she was out of town for a few days.

no upside to sinning, no one would do it. Think about it. No one feels tempted to rent a hotel room so they can read the Gideons' Bible, or to eat an entire stalk of celery, or to search the Internet for pictures of nuns, or to score a dime bag of Flintstone vitamins. No, people are tempted to rent a hotel room so they can have sex with a prostitute, or to eat an entire cheesecake, or to look at pictures of naked supermodels, or to score bags of weed.

Why? Because sinning temporarily feels good and can be fun. So it's not just that we blow it. We don't just sin. We get *hooked* on sinning. We *specialize* in it.

That's not something we proclaim very proudly. Your résumé probably does not list "Specialist in Sinning." Even so, I bet you have things you know you shouldn't do, and you don't want to do anymore, but you can't seem to stop doing. You may not see it as an addiction, or even a habit, but maybe it is.

The question is, *What do we do about it?*

Me Too?

First, we need to admit we have a problem. What we *want* to do first is anything but.

Just like Adam and Eve and David, we try to keep our sickness a secret. Sin isn't a popular word today. Pretty much the only place you'll see it outside of church is on a dessert menu.* The problem is that a problem denied can destroy you, and a problem hidden cannot be healed.

And we need healing.

I can picture you right now. You're squirming a little. You're thinking, *Not me. I'm not sure I need to read this book. I realize I'm not perfect, but my sins don't rank up there with Adam and Eve's or David's. And this book is about recovery and rehab, but I don't have any addictions.*

Guess what? That's what *every* addict thinks.

* I like decadent chocolate desserts as much as the next person. Okay, I like them *more* than the next person.

Addictions like drugs and alcohol are more visible and more socially unacceptable, but we *all* have our addictions—things we couldn't bear the thought of giving up or doing without, habitual ways of thinking or living that aren't healthy. Unfortunately, except for fleeting moments of clarity, we typically don't see them. Ours may not even be a conscious denial. We're just blind to our addictions. As Jesus said, we see the splinter in our friend's eye but miss the tree trunk in our own.²

So we live in denial. It's actually easier for us to live in denial than it is for a drug addict or an alcoholic because even if we are aware of our problems, we can deny that they're serious. The Bible says that we should not be enslaved to or mastered by anything,³ but we can't imagine that applies to the things *we're* obsessed with or controlled by. Our obsessions just seem innocuous and not worthy of being compared to real addictions we don't have.

Except . . . they're really not that different.

That leads to a couple of questions we should probably consider.

First, *what is an addiction?* Basically, it's when a person develops a compulsion to seek something out, loses control in limiting intake of that something, and has a negative emotional reaction when prevented from having that something.

Read that again. Might that describe your relationship with your phone, or video games, or social media, or watching TV, or certain sexual activities?

How does a person become addicted? From a physical perspective, there are reward pathways in the brain that get activated when a person has a pleasurable experience. Sometimes the exhilaration is so pleasurable, the person chooses to do it again.

Unfortunately, habituation—or what some call a “tolerance effect,” where the same action produces less pleasure—often comes into play. But instead of giving up on the activity that's giving less pleasure, the person may go back to it, trying to re-create the sensation of the first time. Because of the tolerance effect and habituation, the person needs to do more of the activity, or do it more often, to get to that same

experience. It keeps taking more and more sex or cheesecake or porn or weed to feel as good as we did before. You don't need me to tell you the root of habituation: it's *habit*. And soon a habit is a full-blown addiction.

Here's the thing: those same reward pathways that get activated by sex or cheesecake or porn or weed get activated in your brain when you buy a new outfit, or have a revenge fantasy about that person you still hate, or accomplish something that makes you feel successful, or share gossip that makes you feel better than someone else, or look lustfully at an attractive body, or notice someone looking lustfully at your body, or receive praise.

What you experience, and perhaps feel compelled to experience again, is really not that different from someone smoking crack or finishing off another bottle of wine.

So now, when you think of addiction, instead of thinking, *Not me!* perhaps you'll realize, *Oh. Me too.*

The truth is, we've all had a blowout. We're all a mess. And your mess is messing up your life. Denial may help you ignore that, but trust me: denial *isn't* working for you.

All of this makes me think of this one time Jesus met a man who was filled with demons. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"⁴

Bet you know where I'm going with this.

If you're going to be healed, you have to *name* your demons. No more hiding. No more concealing.

When David finally stopped living in denial, when he looked in the mirror and acknowledged everything to himself and to God, it set him free. He went from "My body wasted away, and I groaned all day long" to "You forgave me! All my guilt is gone" and "You surround me with songs of victory" and "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad."⁵

Real freedom awaits us, and it starts with naming our demons.

But not yet. Our problem actually goes deeper than this basic understanding of addiction. It's much deeper, and we'll talk about it in the next chapters. Then maybe we'll be ready to reveal our secrets. Because we're only as sick as our secrets. And we don't want to be sick anymore.

* * *

In all honesty, this is going to be difficult to do alone. We weren't made for it. We'll get into that later, but I want to encourage you right now to read this book with others. We've created a digital community as a place to get started. Join TheRestoreCommunity.com to engage with other people on this journey. You'll find videos to go with each chapter and even a detailed PDF journal that will offer reflection questions, Scripture passages, and helpful activities to help restore you to God and one another.