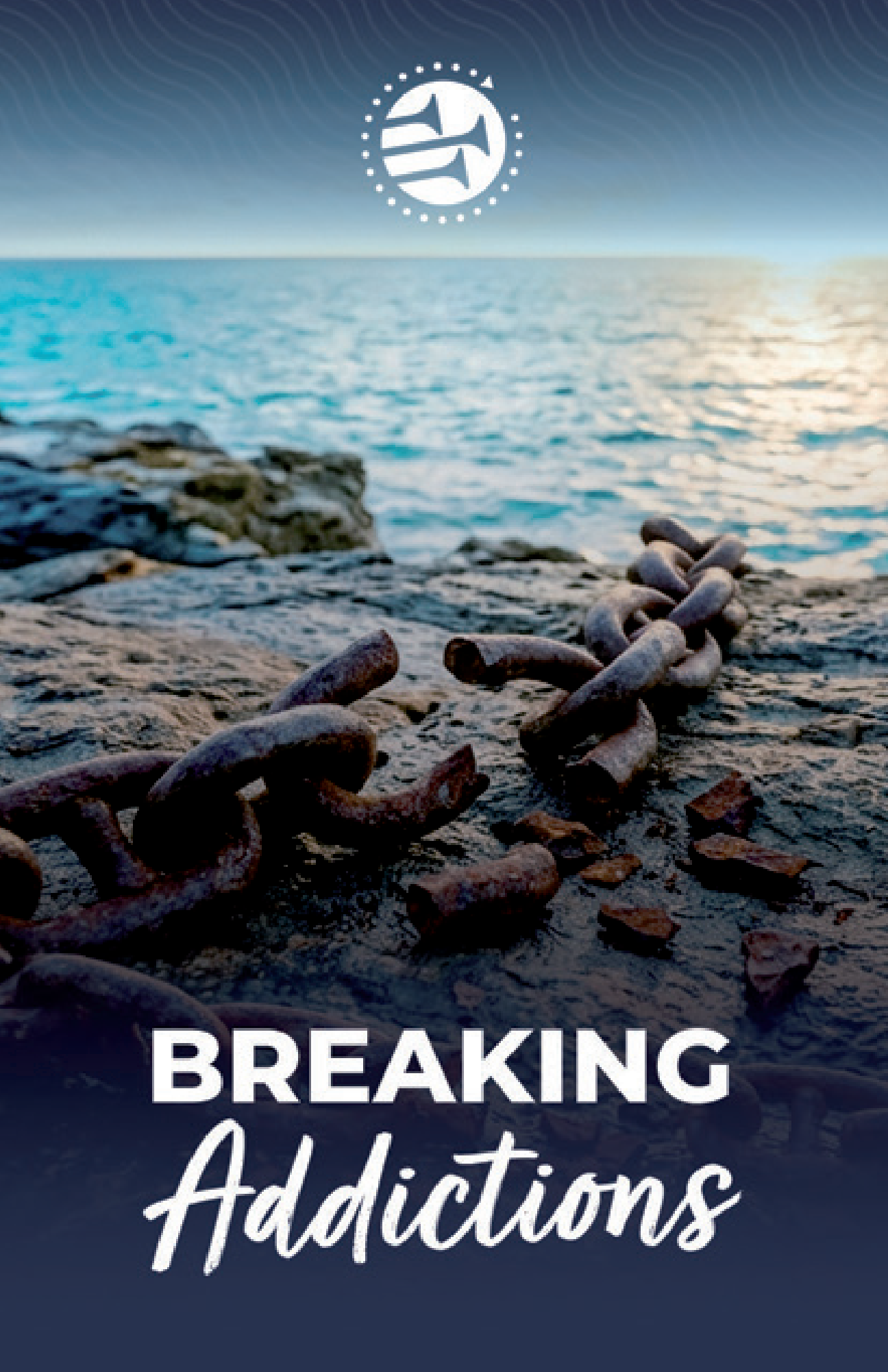

BREAKING *Addictions*

When I saw Ray, he appeared to be at death's door. After a big hug, I looked into his eyes, which were sunk way back into his head. I watched tears welling up. He told me how good I looked and how proud he felt that I was clean and sober. I looked him squarely in the eyes and said, "Ray, you don't have to live like this."

He responded with a perplexed look, cocked his head a little, and asked, "I don't?"

No one had ever told Ray that before. My old friend who did drugs with me, who had abused substances his entire adult life—like my wife and I had—knew no other way.

But here's the good news: No one has to live with an overpowering addiction! After a 25-year addiction, my wife and I broke free. You too can break free of whatever chains may bind you.

Some people spend their lives in a long search for pain relief. The pain may come in a variety of emotional and physical forms. Sadly, many turn to an addiction or bad habit as a coping mechanism to get through life.

The substances most commonly abused are marijuana, methamphetamines, heroin, cocaine, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and opioids, such as prescription painkillers. Behavioral addictions

—what we often think of as bad habits—are much broader and more complex. Some of these common addictions include pornography, sex, gambling, gaming, media bingeing, overeating, shopping, workaholism, or any other type of behavior that people use to escape reality.

Problems From the Start

Often, the origins of these habits can be found in childhood. During the early years of your life, although you weren't aware of it, your brain was developing its own equipment and chemicals that would allow you to deal with life's ups and downs. If this equipment did not develop to its full potential for reasons such as physical abuse, verbal/emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, or other trauma, you may have found yourself searching for other ways to cope with life.

You may be in one of these situations right now, unknowingly trying to deal with scars and emotional distress from the past. You may be searching for pain relief in a behavior or substance you know is not good for you because nothing else brings relief.

You may think to yourself: *How can I give this up? It's the only way I'm able to deal with life.* You

may not even be able to identify the pain and the problems you're running from, which is exactly why behavioral addictions can be so hard to break.

At other times, addiction comes from yielding to your natural human lusts. The Bible says that "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14, 15). The Bible describes someone in this apparently hopeless condition as a slave, "caught in the cords of his sin" (Proverbs 5:22; as well as John 8:34 and Romans 6:16).

The power of addiction can leave you feeling hopeless, and believe me, friend, I've been there. Your addiction is the habit that controls you; you don't control it. The habit tells you when and where to engage in it. To top it all off, each time you choose an addictive behavior, neural pathways are formed that further solidify that addiction.

Overcoming

So, how do you change your coping mechanisms? How do you break free from the harmful

habits that are deeply carved into your neural pathways? How can you construct a new future for yourself?

To fully answer those questions for each individual is impossible to do in this short pamphlet. Each story is unique, and your recovery process may require personal attention and advice, some of which can be found in the resources listed at the end. But the first steps are recognizing that you don't have to live with addictions and identifying the solution.

You have a Father in heaven who doesn't want you to live your life chained to bad habits and addictions. He wants you to live a free, happy, and healthful life. He wants you to leave your past right where it belongs—in the past. He can be your new coping mechanism. He wants these blessings for you so much that He gave us His Son, Jesus Christ, and through Him, He gives you all the power needed to escape the chains that bind you. Jesus said, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Consider this promise: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the

temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Freedom is possible and even assured! God can break the addictive cycle in your life. He is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

Has repeated failure stolen hope from you? Focusing on your shortcomings and weaknesses is discouraging. That is why you must look to God and trust His power. Proverbs 3:5 tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." And in 2 Corinthians 12:9, God promises, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

God knows that your understanding is faulty. He knows that you are emotionally scarred. He knows that you are ashamed of your addiction—and perhaps even hiding it from your family and community. Even so, He still loves you, accepts you, and invites you to trust Him and His ability to give you victory. He has a new way mapped out for you—a way of systematically replacing bad behavior with good behavior, and a way of changing those neural connections in the brain to work to your advantage, rather than to your detriment.

Jesus once asked a disabled man, “Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:6)

That’s His question for you today, my friend. You don’t have to live this way. *A life of freedom, peace, and victory is possible for you!* Jesus is reaching out His hand to you with inexpressible tenderness and pity, saying, “Do you want to be well?” Take His hand and walk into a new life with Him!

Recovery Resources: Specific addictions can be overcome more readily with a structured long-term plan. These websites can help. Ultimately, victory is possible with faith in God, practical changes, and your determined will and effort!

Stop-Smoking Program:
breathefree2.com

Pornography Addiction Recovery:
gatewaytowholeness.com

Youth Addiction Prevention:
youthaliveportal.org

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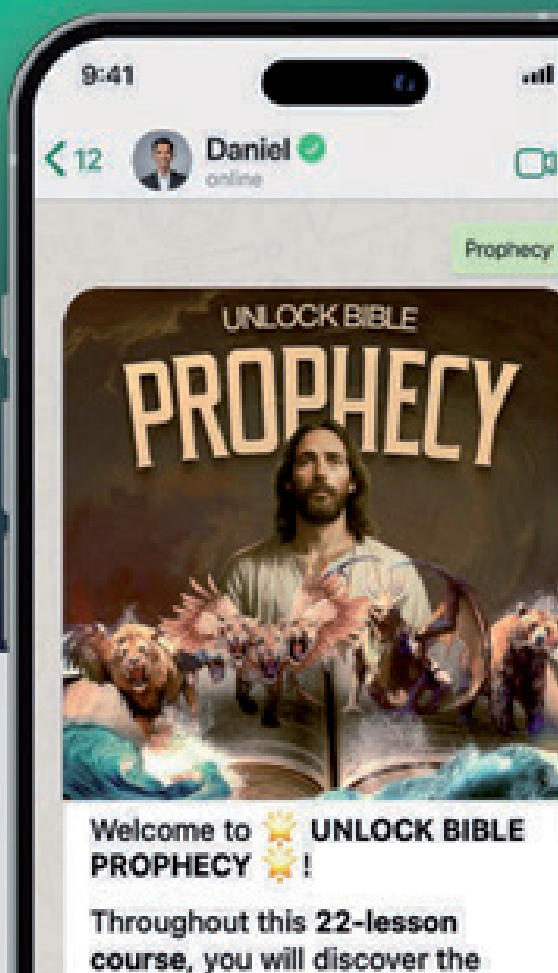

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