Contemporary Comments on the Adult Sabbath School Lesson

[Title] Freedom from Addictions
[Text] Proverbs 23:29-35; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Matthew 25:15-30; Mark 10:17-27; 1 Peter 3:3, 4
[Use] March 12, 2011

"From successful to homeless…" That's how one headline describes the pathway of so many who walk the gripping road of addiction—the topic for this week's Sabbath school lesson.

Huntington, W.Va. (WSAZ) —Breaking free from the cycle of addiction may feel impossible when you're caught in the middle of it. Anyone who's been there will tell you it takes an incredible amount of willpower, determination—and usually a lot of help from another source. "I knew about Tylenol and aspirin," Michael Thomison said. "But I didn't know about hydrocodone." What began eight years ago with one pill, ended up destroying a successful art and framing business in downtown Huntington. "I dipped into everything I had. Plus, lost my home and business, too."

After losing everything, Thomison was living at the Huntington City Mission and started to walking to daily Mass at St. Joseph Church. The pastor, Monsignor Lawrence Luciania, learned of his background and put Thomison to work on art restoration, like the gold leafing project he worked on at Latta's. The spiritual undertone and connection between Thomison's work, as well as with his new life, is hard to ignore. "God has brought me from where I was to this?" Thomison said. "I mean it's a miracle." The owners of Latta's School Supply store have given him studio space to do his art work—just one of many golden opportunities that have come Mike's way since kicking addiction.1

But not all addictions are chemically based.

"Speaking for the first time since he was thrown back in jail last month on charges that he swindled a woman out of $1 million, former NFL draft bust Art Schlichter said his problems are the fault of his addiction to gambling.

"In a jailhouse interview with the Columbus Dispatch, Schlichter stressed that he considers himself to be suffering from an addiction, and he never used the word "gambling," perhaps in an attempt to garner sympathy for what he suggests is behavior that he simply can't control. Schlichter, whom the Colts selected with the fourth overall pick in the 1982 draft, has spent much of his life in prison for various crimes that he committed to fuel his gambling habit.

"It's beyond tough," Schlichter said. "When you let your guard down a little bit, when you don't have the proper support or you don't use that support, you put yourself in these situations. Hopefully, I will have an opportunity to get some treatment, make things right with people and try to help others who struggle in the same way."2

There's a common catch for most addicts—blame. You can hear Schlichter pushing personally responsibility somewhere else. It shuts the door to the freedom God offers to the broken hearted who completely own the problem. Though a bit sarcastic, one comment to Schlicter's story put it simply, "You are getting treatment, Art. It’s called jail." You might feel bad for Art’s momentary slip up until you look at the pattern. In another part of the article, the writer points out, "At this point, it's hard to see why anyone would trust Schlichter to get treatment and make things right. He's been committing crimes to finance his gambling for three decades, and in and out of jail his entire adult life. The biggest surprise in the latest charges against Schlichter is that there was still someone willing to trust him with her money."
Addicts certainly need support and help, but we can provide the wrong kind of sympathy that keeps them bound in a cycle of dependence. All addictions (sex, pornography, chemical, gambling, or seeking wealth) have the common root our first parents demonstrated after God asked them about eating the forbidden fruit—“It’s not my fault.” Until an addict strongly admits, “I have a serious problem,” they will eventually go back to bondage.

Jesus Christ is the only final solution to breaking free. There is no power within us that can break the chains of addiction. We all need help. And help comes to those who completely own the addiction. Let the church be a place of refuge for those struggling with the chains of addiction. May those caught in this web of successful to homeless find among God’s people a place called home. It’s truly a miracle.

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1. WASZ
2. NBC Sports

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