

“Can You Have Multiple Besetting Sins and Still Be a Christian?”

I read the [article](#) that you wrote in response to a gentleman who was almost 70, had prostate cancer and stated that a besetting sin he had caused him to doubt his salvation for years. I related to that somewhat, as I am 68 and also have bouts with doubting my salvation. I always wonder if I have repented as I should and have studied about repentance extensively.

My problem is, I think I have more than one besetting sin. I never can understand whether or not a person can have more than one besetting sin and still be a genuine Christian. My major sin is my weight, having struggled with that for years. But I also struggle, though maybe not as bad, with a temper, easily offended, critical and judgmental thoughts of others, am lazy a lot of the time, sometimes watch TV that I shouldn't, and I have negative thoughts of God, and probably others as well. So you see, I am at a loss as to what is going on with me.

I would so much appreciate it if you could help me understand rather or not a true Christian (an individual Christian, not a general group) can have struggles with all kinds of sins, not just one and still truly be a Christian. This is what has haunted me for years, I even gave up the Christian life and went back into the world, I am ashamed to say, but have been back in the church now for 30 years.

I am so sorry for the way your fears have beaten you up and stolen your joy! All Christians struggle against our flesh, and we all have a number of sin patterns. That's just the way the brokenness of sin plays out in our lives. It's not that

you have more sin patterns than other Christians—it's that you are more aware of your own than of mine, or your pastor's, or anyone else's. Everyone has multiple sin issues. Those that don't think they do, are engaging in the sins of self-deception and pride.

Sin causes such blindness and such brokenness, it's pretty much amazing that we're able to do much that IS right. That's the power of God in our lives.

I love this passage from James Bryan Smith's book *Embracing the Love of God*, in the chapter "Forgiving Ourselves":

[We need to learn] to see ourselves as we truly are. We need to develop a proper identity if we are to forgive ourselves. In today's world, we are prone to viewing ourselves primarily as righteous people who are capable of doing sinful things, as opposed to being sinful people who are capable of doing righteous things. The difference in perspective is monumental.

If I see myself as a righteous person, I expect very little failure. Doing good is what comes naturally to a good person. God, too, I reason, must expect a lot of success from me. Failure, sin, and error occur only when I lose focus, only when I am lazy. If I work hard enough, I can live flawlessly. God is not particularly pleased when I do something good, some act of kindness or courage, because that is what he expected in the first place.

But if I see myself as a weak and broken person, I am not shocked by failure. It does not throw me out of kilter. I certainly do not hope for it, expect it, or easily excuse it, but I am not startled by it. Failure, sin and error do not happen because I get lazy; they are a part of being a fallen person in a fallen world. God is not shocked by my sin; he knows that I am dust (Ps. 103:14). When I do something

courageous, or self-sacrificing, God is pleased. Given all that is against me, a kind act is a thing of awe in God's eyes.

God expects more failure from us than we do from ourselves because God knows who we are. We are not the righteous person who occasionally sins, we are the sinful person who occasionally—by God's grace—gets it right. When we start from this perspective we are released from the bondage of perfectionism and are able to forgive ourselves once and for all. We are to take our cue from him. We may be disappointed with ourselves, but God is not. We may feel like condemning ourselves, but God does not.

Let me encourage you to accept yourself as the flawed but beloved person you are, simply because GOD accepts you fully and completely as the flawed but beloved person you are! He loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay there. That's what sanctification does: it makes messy, broken people over into the image of Jesus. That's the power of Jesus' work on earth . . . that's the power of His love.

Hope you find this helpful in making the decision to accept the grace of God and give it to yourself.

Sue Bohlin

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“My Beseating Sin Makes Me Doubt My Salvation”

I am almost 70 years old and undoubtedly nearing “the end of the road.” I came to faith in Jesus Christ over thirty years ago but have consistently been plagued by a “beseating sin” that I seem not to be able to have consistent victory over. I fall, confess, repent, and have “victory” for awhile, and then fall again. This continual struggle has led me to sometimes doubt my salvation, and I am troubled that perhaps the Lord has grown weary of my shallow commitment and has given up on me. What can I do?? I have recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer and I am in terror of dying and finding myself in hell. Please help!

I am so glad you wrote! You are not alone. I think this secret fear plagues millions of Christ-followers. And I also think that the core of this fear is not knowing how huge is His love for us, and His deep understanding of our broken humanity (Ps. 103:14—“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”).

Our flesh, the part of us that operates independently from God and in our own strength, is hopelessly corrupted and unredeemable. But even though we can operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, in dependence on Christ, the same way that we can fly in an airplane that is dependent on the laws of aerodynamics to get and stay off the ground, eventually we return to our default position of fleshliness.

God knows this, and He understands it! And He loves us anyway. Consider the strong encouragement from Romans 8. The chapter opens with the astonishing statement that is a sure shame-killer: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” NO condemnation! The Lord has not “grown weary of your shallow commitment,” brother. He understands

your weakness and looks forward to the time when you are no longer fettered by the flesh that pulls you down like spiritual gravity.

But then consider the end of the chapter:

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The Lord Jesus died for you and, far from condemning you, intercedes for you this very day!

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nothing can separate us from Jesus' love. Nothing has the power to keep Him from loving us, and nothing has the power to keep us from being loved!

36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

God has pronounced you a conqueror through Christ, and is working to transform you into who He says you are. Even on the days when it doesn't much feel like it. He is still at work!

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Including our sin. Including our brokenness. Including our weak humanity.

And including besetting sins, which He allows us to struggle with so that we will turn to Him in dependence and trust. Recently I was blessed to attend a banquet for a ministry that helps people deal with unwanted same-sex attraction. The star of the evening was Jesus, who showed up in testimony after testimony of changed lives. Every person who spoke, uncoached except by the Holy Spirit, said in one way or another that they are now at the point where they can see that their struggle is a blessing because it forces them to depend on Christ with a desperation they never would have known otherwise. And that dependence on Christ has taken them to a place of intimacy with the Living Lord they didn't know was possible.

God is honored in our struggles, even when we slip and fall but continue to repent and get up again. It's all about teaching us to enter more deeply into relationship with Him, a relationship of love and friendship and affection and appreciation. I hope I have begun to reframe your struggle in a way that enables you to go to Him for help rather than hiding from the only One who has the power to help you stand against your flesh.

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue Bohlin

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“I ’m a Compulsive Masturbator!”

I hate it that I am overpowered by an addiction to porn and compulsive masturbation. I don't understand why I just can't stop it. I really loathe that part of myself. It disgusts me. Can you help?

You and millions of other people, millions MORE now that the internet has invaded our lives!

I serve on the board of [Living Hope Ministries](#), a Christ-centered outreach to those wanting to leave homosexuality. I asked Ricky Chelette, a pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington (TX) and Executive Director of Living Hope, to share his highly understandable explanation of what happens in an addictive cycle, in a way that has also helped many people dealing with their various besetting sins. He graciously gave me permission to offer his material to answer your question. I hope it helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Understanding The Cycle of Sin

This is the cycle of sin that I often share with folks that meet with me. Though I designed this visual image for overcomers with same gender attraction (SGA), I have used it with my single adult group as a whole, for I feel the concepts are universal though the vehicles we use to accomplish our end result might be somewhat different.

Take a look at this diagram.



Hunger or poor Health
Angry
Lonely
Tired
Stressed
Depressed

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You begin the cycle of sin at the bottom of the page where you see the letters and blank lines.

Though many of you think that what triggers you is the sight of a good looking man/woman, I think something much deeper is taking place. Most of our triggers fall into one of these broad categories:

- **Health**

I am talking about bad health. When you are sick you are open to temptation.

- **Hunger**

When we are hungry we can feel temptation.

- **Angry**

- **Lonely**

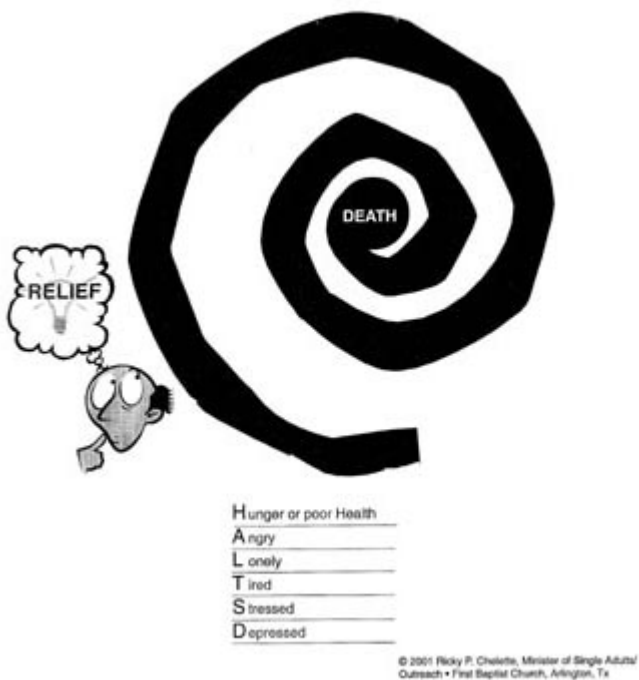
Need I say more...

- **Tired**

- **Stressed**

- **Depressed**

Whenever we feel one of these feelings or something closely related to one or more of them, we have the thought of RELIEF. We all want relief from the pain, hurt and stresses of our lives.

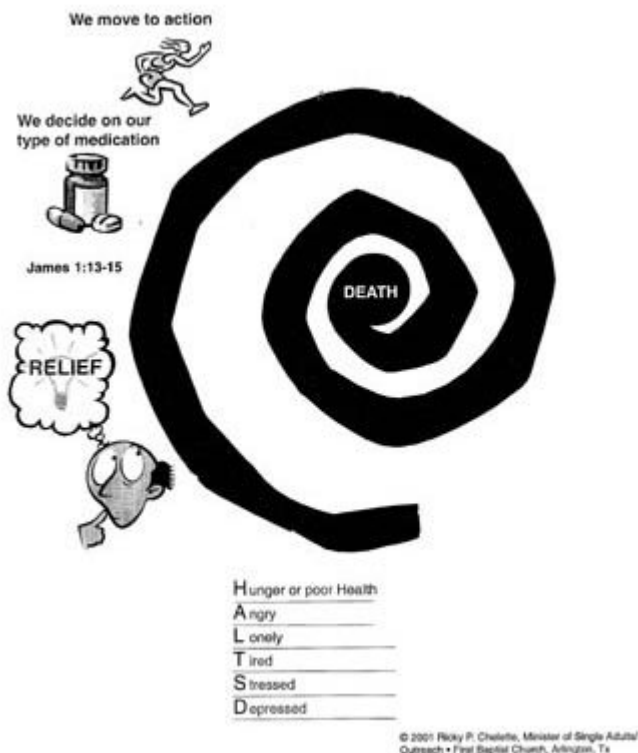


The way that we find relief is to seek some form of medication. This does not have to be actual medication, though it can be and this is how people get addicted to drugs, but it is medication all the same. It is something that causes us to experience pleasure and relief.



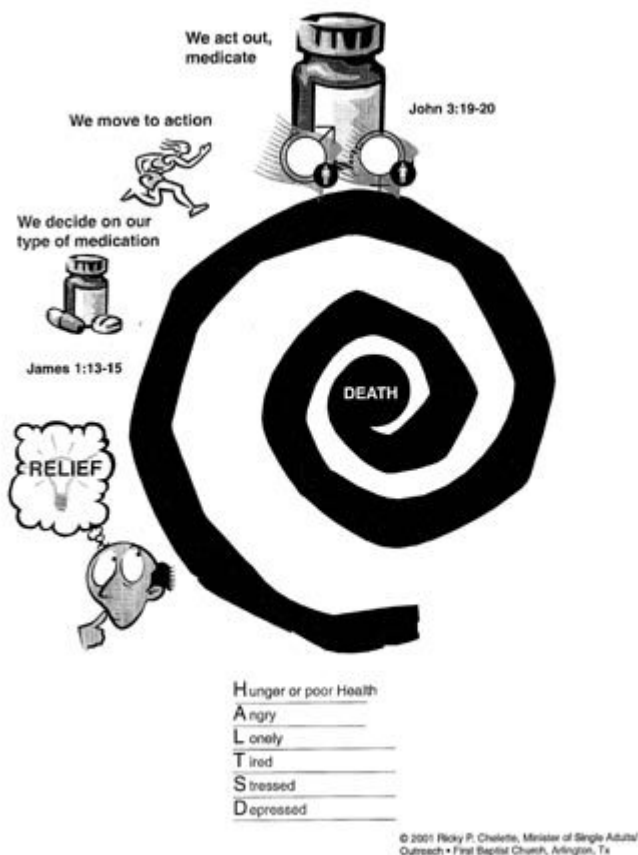
So we move from the bottom of the diagram to the thought for relief (the man and the bubble) to the thought of what we will do to medicate our pain and find relief (bottle of pills).

When we decide to medicate our pain we go through some action (the runner) before we actually get to the medication.



Oddly enough, even the action toward the intended medication, is somewhat medicinal itself. For example: If you are going to do the big M (masturbation) for your medication you might get undressed and lay in bed, or jump in a warm shower. If you are going to cruise P (internet Porn) on the internet you might get into something more comfortable and begin the search process. If you are going to act out with another or “cruise,” you might get cleaned up and put on some alluring clothing or other articles that would give clues to your intent. Basically, you go through some sort of ritual of preparation. It just doesn’t “happen.” However, we have done this ritual so many times that it feels quite automatic—we may not even realize that we are doing it. It is at this stage that most people tell me that they feel as though they really can’t help themselves—“it is like another person has taken over my body and I am just on autopilot.” In many ways, they really are. I am convinced that once you move from thought to action, it is very difficult if not nearly impossible to stop the ultimate medication/action from taking place. Yes, of course God could intervene, but He has created us with free will and

He rarely interferes with our willful decisions. During this phase of the cycle you are also likely to be producing adrenalin; a very strong chemical that makes a person's heart rate increase, increases their blood pressure, and gives them a sense of invincibility.



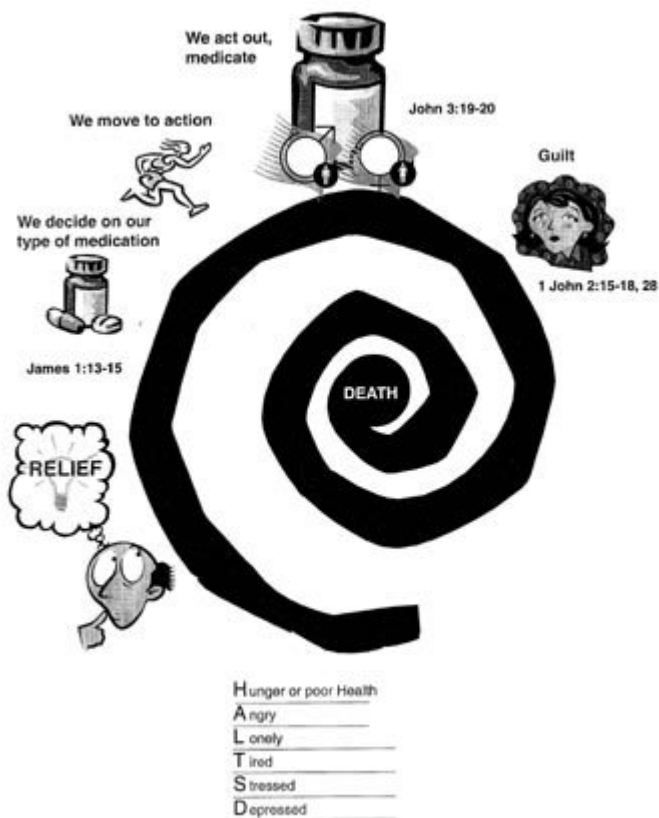
Finally, you carry out your medicative fix by doing the big M or having sex and achieving an orgasm in some way. When you do this, your brain produces a chemical called endorphin. This chemical is extremely strong, some say even ten times stronger than cocaine.

Every time you achieve an orgasm or act out in some way to achieve your medication, endorphins are produced and your body responds in a very predictable way. This is why you get that feeling of pleasure, euphoria, or peace when you orgasm (medicate). There are actually chemicals being produced in your brain that make you feel good. The preparation for the orgasm also can produce these chemicals (remember Pavlov's salivating dogs?!) but not in the same quantity or intensity

as the orgasm itself. (Now you are at the top of our diagram—medicine bottle)

I want you to think of your brain as a CD. Each time endorphins are produced, you burn another track on that CD. If you keep playing the same tune (producing the same chemical) over a period of months/years, you burn a rut in your CD and it is very, VERY difficult to get out of that rut. It is a universal, psychologically proven fact. We establish pathways in our brain that demand that we do certain things and get our fix. Thus, we continue to the cycle of medicating our hurts. .

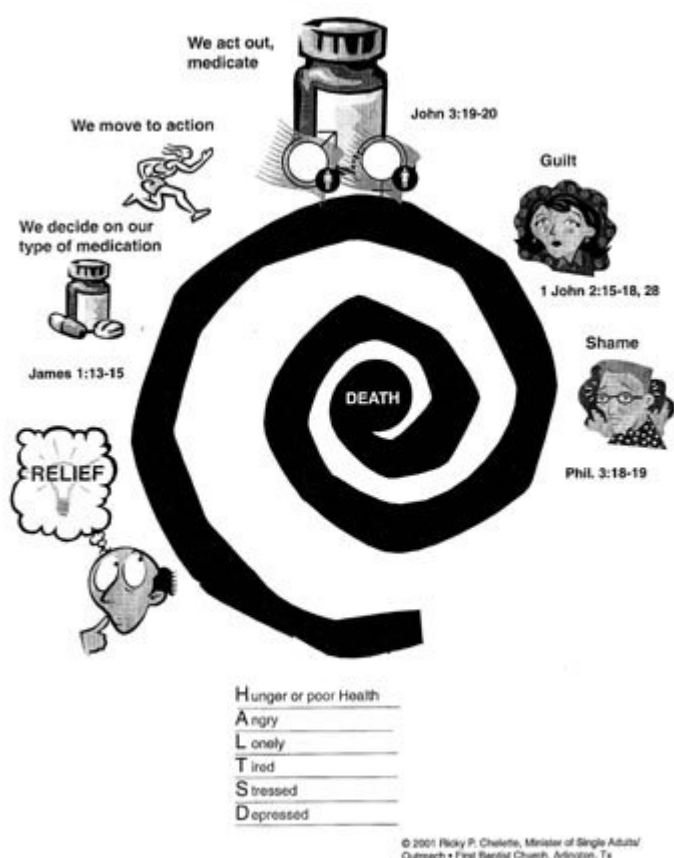
However, like every high, it is followed by an equally powerful low. The low begins as the chemicals in our brain are absorbed and assimilated into our bodies. We first begin to feel guilty (the lady that is crying on the diagram).



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I believe that guilt and conviction are really good things. I see them as a way that the Spirit of God brings correction and

discipline to our lives. However, many times we feel guilt, but we don't confess and repent. We simply feel guilty. We do this because we think that God will not hear our prayers. . . again, for the thing that we seem to keep doing over and over. As a result, not too long after we feel guilt, Satan comes in and uses our sense of guilt to make us feel shame (the man that looks perplexed).



Shame, I believe, is of the devil. The difference between guilt and shame is that guilt is over our actions—things we do. Shame is feeling bad about who we are—our sense of self. Shame causes us to review the lies of Satan and our old tapes that tell us that, “I am worthless. God doesn’t really love me. I am a loser. No one will ever love me. I will never be rid of this sin. I am gay. Etc., etc.”



These self-loathing statements do nothing but drag us further down the cycle so that we become confused, stressed, angry, lonely, etc. (the confused triple-headed person). And where does that lead us?

Back at the beginning of the cycle to keep repeating our sin again and again..

You should also notice that this spiral makes an inward progression that ends at a black hole. You see, what happens with our desire to medicate is that each time we do it, it takes a bit more stimulation to get us to the place that we have the same medicative results. We constantly need more. That is why the spiral is a spiral and not just a circle. It draws us in, deeper and deeper, until we reach the black hole—DEATH. James 1 says when sin is complete it will bring forth death: spiritual death, emotional death, and even physical death. The process is gradual most of the time, but it is guaranteed.

Take for example the person who starts out just looking at a

"Men's Health" magazine. Nothing wrong with that really. But there are some buff men that have their shirts off. They get excited about that, do a little lusting and masturbate and then they decide to find some porn on the internet. At first it is "mild porn" and then they have a need to find more explicitly sexual pornography, etc. Before you know it that is not enough for them and they search for chat rooms. They start chatting dirty and eventually they decide to call and talk with someone. They won't meet. At least not this time.... But sooner or later chatting is not enough and they meet... and they have sex... and you know the rest of the story...



Our desire to medicate will take us further and further down this path of destruction. The results are guaranteed, but so is its destructive end.

So how do we break the cycle of sin in our lives?

I really think that there is only one opportunity for us to break the cycle. I think that we have to learn how to cope effectively and Biblically with our triggers.

If, when we realize that we are experiencing a trigger, we want relief (which we all do naturally) this is OK. However, this is where the discipline comes in. When we want relief we have to move from seeking to medicate our pain with acting out, to taking that need to medicate to the One who is the Great Physician—God. We have to go to Him, at this early stage, and tell Him what we are experiencing; what is going on with us; and ask Him for help. We have to do what 2 Cor. 10:5b says, “Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Every thought... not just some, but especially those that seek relief.

If we do this, we are able to kick ourselves out of the cycle of sin and find victory and freedom in Christ.

Is it that easy? Absolutely not. It is hard work. Many of you have not yet learned how to identify the triggers and that will be your first step. But with God’s help, it is doable.

Now, don’t think that this is just a struggler thing. It is not.

Here’s another example from my wife who does not struggle with SGA issues at all (thank God!). She is a nurse in ICU; a very stressful job. She is also a self-proclaimed chocoholic (any ladies relate to this?). Many times, when things are going bad at work (stress trigger), she says she can “hear” the candy machine calling her name (need for relief). She puts things in order with her patients (action/ritual) and sneaks out to the machine (more action) and eats a candy bar (medication). After she eats it she gets an insulin rush (sugar high) which makes

her feel all euphoric and wonderful only to be followed by a sugar low which makes her feel guilty and convicted because she knows that she shouldn't handle stress by eating. She then can easily slip into a shame cycle of self-loathing thinking that she is too fat (which she is not), out of control, etc. and the cycle begins again. [She told me I could share this as this diagram has helped her understand you and herself better.]

The same could be said of people who shop when they are triggered, spend money, drink coffee, become violent, use drugs or alcohol, etc. Same triggers, different courses of medication, different chemicals produced (sometimes), but all ending in the same results.

Well, I hope this makes some sense to you and is helpful to you in visualizing and getting a handle on what is taking place in your life. I would really encourage you to memorize the 2 Cor. 10:5b passage and the James 1:13-15 passage as these can help you in directing your thinking when you begin to think "RELIEF"—it will point you to Christ rather than to medication.