

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Mountain Climbing, Hydration, and Habits

-by Dr. John P. Splinter

Later in this booklet you'll read a story of potentially life-threatening event that took place on a mountain at 13,400 feet. It's a personal story and is a bit embarrassing to share. Before getting to that story, a few "building blocks" may be helpful. A couple of them come from the field of psychology. The main "building blocks" come from the Bible.

Three Stages Of Impure Habits

One way of understanding progressive behavior is to break it down into stages. Here are three stages outlining the development and sequential ownership of what we'll call "impure habits." Most people have at least one habit that they recognize as somewhat less than pure, or good, or perhaps healthy, but they do it anyway. So let's begin by looking at the progression of these habits. They can be seen as a three-stage progression.

Stage One ~ Adventure/dabbling ~ In the first stage we're cool, and we're just toying with the habit. In this stage we like the activity. We may consider it "pre-habit" or "just a small habit." Either way, we feel it's harmless and we feel we're pretty much in control. We may even think we're slick because we can get away with it. We may see ourselves as somehow "above" others who aren't into our habit. In this stage we may defend our "right" to the habit.

Stage Two ~ Love/hate ~ In this stage we are aware that it's definitely a habit, and somewhere in the second stage our habit morphs into a bit of a "love/hate" thing. Whereas in the first stage we "liked" the activity, in the second stage we begin to recognize we "need" the activity. Somehow this formerly harmless habit got stronger along the way. In the second stage we begin to be aware of the ownership this habit is gaining in our lives. We may have tried to stop a few times. We may begin to recognize some of the damage it's doing in our characters and perhaps our relationships.

Stage Three ~ Addiction/weakness ~ In stage three our habit is now a dominant force in our lives. It has become an "addiction/weakness" thing. We now recognize we "crave" the habit and are incapable of stopping. We can't make it for very long without the habit. The habit has morphed again, and now we will do almost anything to have access to it, even though we recognize how weak it makes us. And as the habit has gotten stronger, it has taken us into darker places than we ever thought we'd go. We may hate the habit, but we feel powerless against it. Furthermore, anyone who tries to help us risks becoming our enemy.

Have you ever wondered why some people seem naturally, innately stronger against forming bad habits? One of the ground-level reasons has to do with the condition of the deepest part of their being ~ a part that we'll call the "soul." Some people are "set up" for moral struggles from the earliest days of their childhood. Let's look more deeply at this phenomenon.

How "Soul Pain" Often Sets The Stage For Impure Habits

Impure habits are often tied to soul pain. Soul pain is what happens in our deepest "selves" when our need for others gets twisted, rejected or crushed. In the field of psychology we talk about people who have "abandonment issues," or "abuse issues," or "attachment issues." When young human beings are not lovingly tended, when their basic human needs are not met, it causes pain in the deepest "self" ~ we'll call it the "soul." Here are a few examples of people who often carry soul pain.

- People who faced emotional deficits in childhood ~ for example, kids who had:
 - Work-a-holic parents who never had time for them.
 - Alcoholic parents whose addiction dominates the family system.
 - Drug abusing parents (illicit drugs or even OTC drugs).
 - Parents who divorced, especially if the divorce was bitter and fighting.
 - Parents with mental/nervous disorders.
 - Emotionally distant parents.
 - Emotionally abusive parents.
- People who as children were physically abused (e.g., beaten, starved, kicked, etc.).
- Or sexually abused (raped, fondled, coerced into sexual acts).
- Or emotionally traumatized.
- Or rejected by their parents.
- Children who experienced the premature death of a parent often carry soul pain.
- Children who grew up in single parent families (as I did), often carry soul pain.

Soul pain can be understood through the following metaphor. Imagine a beautiful sea anemone whose long tendrils reach outward into the azure ocean, waving to and fro with the ocean's currents. The tendrils are slender and beautiful. Those tendrils are like a child's soul as it reaches toward a parent, for love, nurturing, affirmation, support and protection. They are connectors, helping the child emotionally attach ~ also helping the child understand the world and relationships.

Now imagine taking a blow-torch to the tendrils. The result is that the tendrils become gnarled, burned, blackened, shriveled, scarred and unable to feel. Those tendrils are like a child's soul after being deeply harmed by those who were supposed to provide love and nurture. Those damaged tendrils will cause the child to have a difficult time attaching to anyone. The tendrils are now painful. They are inadequate. They lead the child to turn inward rather than outward.

That's a picture of soul pain. Granted, the metaphor of a sea anemone is just a mental picture. But it's a valid explanation of adults who were damaged during childhood. Now these damaged

kids become adults, and because of their damaged souls they are more susceptible to the false solutions offered by the Enemy of God.

Coping Mechanisms

To deal with this pain, kids often learn “coping mechanisms,” to help them. Coping mechanisms are any sort of habitual behavior that is aimed at reducing the emotional pain or emptiness in the child’s life. In today’s culture, perhaps most frequently utilized coping mechanism when dealing with soul pain, is “sexualizing one’s anxiety.” Here are three examples:

- A child learns that the best way to avoid a bipolar mother is to stay far away from her. As an adult, this person generalizes this behavior and therefore stays at arm’s length from *all* people. The emotional connection needed to sustain marriage is not in this person’s vocabulary. Their loneliness leads them to the fleeting emotional “attachments” of sexual promiscuity.
- Another child believes he/she was responsible for the sexual abuse that happened at the hand of a step-father or uncle. As an adult, this person believes that sexual activity is primarily what he/she is valued for. So they drift from one sexual partner to the next in search of feeling love.
- Another child experiences the abandonment issues inherent in having an alcoholic or a work-a-holic parent, or the sense of loss and rejection that often comes through their parents’ bitter divorce. As an adult, this person is driven to fill the emptiness created by this sense of abandonment, and learns the *false sense of momentary attachment* through visual sex (pornography), which rapidly morphs into compulsive masturbation and sex addiction.

These are just three examples of “coping mechanisms” that people learn when they are young. These tools often become sexualized when the children reach adulthood. The problem with coping mechanisms is that they have limited effectiveness. And sexualized coping mechanisms rapidly become highly destructive and isolating. For example, it’s not uncommon today to hear of a man who lost his job or his marriage due to his addiction to pornography.

Not all impure habits are based upon dysfunctional coping mechanisms stemming from childhood. However all impure habits lead to, or *develop* dysfunctional coping mechanisms that end up being destructive in adults’ lives. *At this level of understanding, the conversation necessarily becomes spiritual, for our sexuality is profoundly spiritual.*

How God’s Enemy Works

Here’s how Satan works. *He hits us hardest, in the place we are weakest, at the moment we’re least able to withstand him.* He’s not a gentleman in any sense of the word. He doesn’t leave when we ask him to go. He ridicules us when we trip over the snares he places in our path. He constantly reminds us of our failures. He uses shame to both drive us to secretive behavior, and to enrage us. He isolates us from all sources of love, whether God’s love, a spouse’s love, a

child's love, or a friend's love. Once we're isolated, he injects us with venomous doses of self-pity, fear, helplessness, and sadness ~ all of which morph into anger and rage. He is absolutely and consistently dishonest. He is the source of soul pain; he loves to aggravate it.

And a very important trait to understand is that he slanders us in the presence of God. We can see this in the following Bible story:

One day as the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan, the Accuser, came with them. "Where have you come from?" the Lord asked Satan. And Satan replied, "From Earth, where I've been watching everything that's going on." Then the Lord asked Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth-a good man who fears God and will have nothing to do with evil."

"Why shouldn't he when you pay him so well?" Satan scoffed. "You have always protected him and his home and his property from all harm. You have prospered everything he does-look how rich he is! No wonder he 'worships' you! But just take away his wealth, and you'll see him curse you to your face!" (Job 1:6-11 ~ TLB)

Did you catch the slander? God was bragging on Job, and Satan said, "He's nothing! He only likes you because you've been good to him, but take away his home and property and he'll ***'curse you to your face.'***" Satan was "dissing" Job in God's presence, even while God was complementing him.

In Zechariah 3:1 we see the same principle, in another situation. The prophet Zechariah was having a vision. Part of this vision involved the High Priest of Israel – the person with the highest holy position in the whole nation. Here's the story: ***"Then the Angel showed me (in my vision) Joshua the High Priest standing before the Angel of the Lord; and Satan was there too, at the Angel's right hand, accusing Joshua of many things" (Zech. 3:1 ~ TLB).*** Satan was "dissing" the High Priest, in the presence of God. That's what he does.

A final example speaks for itself. The scene is in heaven, and God is wrapping things up at the end of all time. ***"Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, "It has happened at last! God's salvation and the power and the rule, and the authority of his Christ are finally here; for the Accuser of our brothers has been thrown down from heaven onto earth ~ he accused them day and night before our God" (Rev. 12:10 ~ TLB).***

Let's apply this to your life. If you think you're going to slip any sin of any kind under the radar, then you don't understand the Enemy of God. He thrives on our sin. He throws it in our faces like cold vomit, and he accuses us in the presence of God. He uses the soul pain that he helped create in our lives, as a lever to make us feel worse about ourselves.

If you struggle with sexual addiction at any level, then you are already personally familiar with Satan's slander. You are aware of that nagging whisper in the back of your mind that says, "You are a loser. You're weak ~ you can't stop this sexual stuff. God is disappointed in you. If anyone knew what you were into, they'd reject you. You know better, but you keep doing it."

How God Works

By contrast, scripture teaches that God is willing to forgive us and clean us up every time we fall, and then strengthen us where we're weak. Here's one of God's promises to us: ***"If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. [And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins.]" (1 John 1:0 ~ TLB).***

Furthermore, He's willing to take the load of our sin off of our backs, and put it onto Christ's back. That load may be from sin that we've committed. It may also be from sins of others, that affected our lives and caused us deep soul pain. Here's a personal story about carrying heavy loads.

The Mountain Climbing Story

When I was younger I was a fairly strong guy. I tipped the scales at 210, but could bench press 325. I could run for miles. Running a triathlon was just a nice workout. One of the greatest joys of my life involved taking people out to Colorado, and climbing mountains. On one trip I took a group to a high mountain valley, and the next day we climbed a fairly tall mountain. This was in preparation for our later climbing a "fourteener."

The mountain of the day was a two-mile long ridgeback topping out at about 13,400 feet. Our goal was to climb up on one end, hike the two mile length at the top, and then go back down to the valley at the far end of the mountain. We left most of our backpacks at base camp, taking only the essentials of food, water, weather gear, medical kit, and one climbing rope to be used in case of emergency.

I carried the backpack holding drinking water plus some of the ponchos. The pack probably weighed 65 pounds. On that day something curious happened to me ~ my strength quit on me. The first symptom that I was in trouble was when I stumbled and had a hard time getting back up. I took my pulse and found it was 250, and not slowing down as I rested. Furthermore, I was cold ~ my body wasn't generating its normal heat. I felt weak and confused. For the first time since I was a child, I faced a moment when I needed someone else's strength and mental clarity. It was apparent to everyone around me that I was in some sort of trouble.

It was quickly decided that I must hand off the backpack to another person, and then one of the team and I headed down the mountain together toward our base camp at 10,300 feet. Once there my partner heated some water and I drank several bowls of warm soup (i.e., warmth, liquids, salts). I then crawled into my sleeping bag. My partner placed fire-heated rocks in my sleeping bag to help warm me. It took until three a.m. the next morning for my heart to finally settle back into sinus rhythm and for my body to regain the ability to warm itself.

In retrospect, we didn't take nearly enough water along for an eight hour climb. Up on the mountain, when we recognized this mistake, being the head leader, I decided to under-hydrate myself in order to give more of the water to the others who needed it. After all, I was invincible

and didn't need water when everyone else did....(stupid!). This decision may have made sense from one perspective, but it had the effect of putting my life in jeopardy.

So, was I a weakling for handing off the backpack to another man? If you know anything about high altitude and high exertion, you recognize I was suffering from hypothermia and exertion-induced heart arrhythmia, both products of under-hydration ~ either of which could have been fatal. So taking corrective action was very appropriate. My team did four things: 1) Someone else took the backpack; 2) one of the team took me to lower altitude where there was more oxygen; 3) they rehydrated me with hot soup; and 4) they used hot rocks to re-warm my body. Had I attempted to continue at high altitude, it's very possible I'd have died. Something had to change.

So it is with ungodly sexual habits. They are enormously destructive ~ they put our relationships at risk ~ they destroy our character ~ they actually make it difficult for us to "attach" to others. But God offers to take these habits off our shoulders. Scripture says, ***"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7)***. At the moment you begin to experience that sense of lust and sexual hunger that you know will soon lead you to sexually acting out, picture yourself taking off the "sexual backpack" and handing it to Christ. Pray this: "Christ, I can't carry this pack. It's too heavy for me, and it's destroying me. You died for this sin. Here, take it. Thanks." Then to the best of your ability, walk away from the sinful thoughts. Change your activities. Think different thoughts. Pray. As Satan brings more impure thoughts back to you, picture yourself handing them off again and again to Christ.

Scripture also says, ***"Submit yourselves...to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7)***. Many men have been in my office over the years, and have said, "This promise isn't true for me." They have tried to resist the devil, but he hasn't "fled" from them. The thing to keep in mind, is that the power of the promise is not found in the second half of this verse. In-and-of ourselves, we don't have the strength to resist the devil enough to make him "flee" from us. Rather, the power of the verse is in the first half which says, ***"Submit yourselves to God."*** Satan's not afraid of our power ~ but he is powerless when in the presence of God's power. The lesson to be learned is that *our ability to withstand Satan's seductions in our lives is a matter of our proximity to God*. The closer we are to our Father, the weaker the Enemy becomes in our lives.

As I came down that mountain on that day, I was in pretty serious trouble. I was losing control of my body. Neither my mind nor my muscles were working right. I didn't have my normal strength. There were times on the way down that I needed my partner to steady me. My lips were turning numb, so speech was becoming difficult. I was fighting dizziness. Because we were taking a "shortcut," we found ourselves scrambling over scree (loose boulders). We both knew that one tippy piece of scree, or one wrong move on the scree could have pinned us with the weight of a multi-ton slab of granite. So I really needed my partner. This wasn't a drill – it was the real deal.

That's how it is with God. As our partner, He's always there ~ and the spiritual fight against sexual habits is the real deal ~ it's not a drill. In His own words, God says, ***"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5)***. On that rapid descent, I could have played the "big

man” and said to my partner, “Hey, I’m OK – why don’t you head back with the rest of the team. I’ll just skip on back to camp.” If my partner had left me, I’m honestly not certain what may have become of me. Fortunately, that didn’t happen.

The good news is that it never happens with God. This doesn’t mean we never fall. It only means that when we fall, our Partner is there to help pick us up, steady us, head us in the right direction again, and support us as we start moving forward.

Some people worry that they’ve sinned too often and God won’t forgive them any more when they mess up. That’s actually one of the lies Satan loves to whisper. Christ called Satan, “The Father of Lies.” If you sense that lie in the recesses of your mind, then memorize part of the verse that was given above, “...he (i.e., God) can be depended on to **forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.**” This is to say, you might not be able to make it through the day without sexual sin, but that’s the goal ~ that’s the “base camp” toward which you are headed. Meanwhile on the journey toward “base camp” *you are forgiven each time you ask for forgiveness.*

The morning after my hypothermia and arrhythmia, the sun came up, we carbed up with a great breakfast of pancakes, canned bacon, orange juice and dried apricots. *We all drank plenty of water (!)* from the nearby stream ~ packed up camp, shouldered our backpacks, and we were off to climb other mountains. You can *bet* I kept well hydrated from that point forward. (No more yellow pee for me.) Let’s now see if we can milk this story and gain a little more insight.

Avoiding Spiritual Hypothermia

1. Stay properly hydrated. Scripture gives many tips on staying spiritually healthy. One of those tips says, “***The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom***” (2 Cor 3:17). If you are aware of areas in your life that are “enslaved” to impure habits, then this verse is for you. Picture yourself tattooing the verse onto your soul, in a place where every spiritual being can see it when they’re in your neighborhood. Then adopt a personal philosophy that says, “I’m all about spiritual freedom.”

Again, you might not have immediate freedom, but one begins laying the groundwork for it by learning that *our proximity to Christ is the key to our freedom. **Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*** Stay close to God ~ and not just for a day or two ~ this is a lifetime principle. You’ll find that when you’re close to God, the Enemy is weak in your life. When you wander, the Enemy gets stronger.

In the hike from living with impure habits, to the freedom of living without them, the challenge is to stay hydrated with God’s Spirit. It’s not the “religious” thing to do; it’s the “spiritually smart” thing to do. The Apostle Paul nailed it as he admitted his own limitations in his first letter to the church in Corinth. He said, “***My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power***” (1 Cor. 2:4-5 ~ NIV). In pushing back against impure habits, stay hydrated with God’s power. Stay close to God through regular daily prayer and obedience. There is no substitute for water. There is no substitute for prayer.

2. Stay light. One of the mistakes I made that day on the mountain, was to assume it was a better idea for me to carry all the water in one backpack, than for three or four of us to spread the load. After all, I was “Big John.” We could have easily brought along a couple more backpacks and put several Nalgene water bottles into each one. But no, “Big John” had to carry it all.

There’s a parallel here, and it involves forgiveness. Remember, Satan is called “the accuser” and “the slanderer.” You’re never going to slip one past him. The only way to lighten the load of your sin, is to accept the forgiveness and cleansing offered by Christ. Otherwise, your sin is a load you’ll carry to your grave ~ and the Evil one will make very sure it’s well attached to your soul. Then he’ll rip you for doing the sin, he’ll rip you for your weakness as you carry it, and he’ll point his bony finger at you and slander you in the presence of God.

So every day, begin and end the day with this prayer. “Father, I am a sinful person. I don’t want to sin, but I’m weak. Please give me Your strength so I can resist sin, and based on what Jesus has done for me, please forgive me for the sins I have committed. Please cleanse me again, and help me to fly right. Amen.” And each time you pray, accept the forgiveness God give you.

After that, *every time Satan reminds you of where you’ve been, remind him of where he’s going.* Stay light. Once forgiven, always forgiven.

3. Pack smart. Anyone who has carried a 45-pound pack for a few days, has learned that there’s a smart way and a dumb way to pack your backpack. Smart people pack the heavy stuff as close to their backs, as they can. (Less than smart people leave heavy stuff packed far away from their backs. This causes the backpack to pull away from the shoulder straps. After a few miles you feel like you’re carrying the Empire State Building.)

Out on the trail, as the days go by people tend to re-adjust their load. For example, after you’ve worn your undies four days (two days right-side out; two inside-out), they’re no longer kept in the same place in the pack as when you first started hiking. Indeed, you may wash them in a stream and then hang them on the outside of your backpack to air them out and terrify nearby bears or cougars.

Scripture teaches us how to spiritually pack. ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12:1-2 ~ NIV).***

On one mountain trip, one of the guys liked to collect rocks. “Oh, look at this one ~ it has crystals.” “Ooohhhh, look at that one, it’s all black ~ cool!” Within a couple of days this dude was carrying a very heavy backpack.... When he started complaining about how many miles we were logging each day, and how difficult it was to breathe at 12,000 feet, we suggested he trash his stash of rocks. Next day was better for all of us.

Scripture says we need to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds.” This isn’t something we do alone. It’s a hand-in-hand effort with God’s Spirit cleaning house and building an entry

check-point with a new sign that reads, “Trash stays in the garbage can ~ don’t bring it in here.” As we obey, the “stuff” we carry in our minds begins to change. It’s like repacking our backpack, but this time with more intelligence; and this time with God’s approval of what goes into the mind. As a result, our entire way of thinking begins to change, and it’s all good.

In the final analysis, impure habits can only remain as strong as what we feed them. That’s true even of those habits born out of deepest soul pain. If we invite God into the process (moment by moment ~ not just one time eight years ago), He’s really good at healing soul pain, and then breaking the backs of bad habits, burying them at the foot of the cross. So be aware of every single thing you pack in your mind. Ask God to “transform” it.

4. Remember your compass and topo Only an idiot would go out into the mountains without a compass and topo (topographical map) ~ but there are lots of idiots around. A topo without a compass is partially helpful, but sometimes in the mountains it’s easy to be pretty darned sure you’re facing South when you’re actually facing West, or North, or East. A compass can take care of that. And so it was that one day we came across a group of hikers who had been lost for two days. They weren’t Boy Scouts but if I told you who they were, you’d laugh. They had a topo but had lost or broken their compass. We helped them re-orient.

As you whack impure habits, your topo is the Bible. It’s the map, and it’s never wrong. So if God says “Do this,” then do it. If He says, “Don’t do that,” then don’t do it. It’s that simple. Unfortunately, some people read it upside down. (Well, not really, but they might as well.) Some people forget that God is all about grace. They start reading the map as if it says, “Do this, and God will whack you.” “Do that, and God will whack you too.” “And God is all about metrics, and definitions, so get your stuff right or He’s really going to get mad.” When you come across these types of people, just leave them where you found them and move on.

In reading the map (God’s Word) always center the compass on His grace. If True North doesn’t doesn’t point toward grace, then something’s not right ~ someone’s been messing with the compass. Every one of the letters written by the Apostle Paul begins with the word “grace” in the first sentence. These letters don’t begin with justice, or justification, or purity. They all begin with grace. One of the greatest verses in the Bible says, ***“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph 2:8-9 ~ NIV).***

So how does this apply to whacking impure habits? It’s simple. Every time you fall and fail, confess your sin ~ accept God’s forgiveness and grace ~ then, re-aim yourself at obedience and trust your Father’s love. When you fall again, confess your sin again ~ accept his forgiveness and grace again ~ then re-aim yourself at obedience and trust your father’s love, again ~ and again ~ and again.

God’s grace is like one of those wonderful icy cold mountain streams that gush out of the high country, cutting through rock and creating waterfalls. Some of the “pebbles of sin” will be washed away in the flood of His love and grace. Other big “sin-rocks” may take a while for His love and grace to round them off and chisel His son’s face in them. But once He starts the

process, it's going to get done. Once you've given yourself to God, you're on His watch now, and He doesn't drop the ball. Ever.

Your strength in all of this is not based upon yourself. That's the mistake I made in the mountains when I carried all the water. I thought it was all about me being strong. Rather, your strength is in the hydration of God's Spirit. On that day in the mountains, if I'd stayed properly hydrated, I'd have been fine. I never had that experience again, because from then on I stayed well-hydrated. And you'll find that as you start to fight against impure habits, it's all about your hydration with God's Spirit. It's His strength, not yours. You just stay super-close to Him.

5. Ask for help if you need it. When I was young one of my coaches taught us to “push through” moments in which we felt exhausted or weak. Sometimes that philosophy works. One time for example, I was taking a leadership training course at the “Minnesota Outward Bound” camp. Our first day there they woke us at some nasty hour of pre-dawn darkness and said we were going to go “jogging” before breakfast. In their demented Northern blond-hair Swedish minds, jogging meant running three 7-minute miles down a dirt road. At the end of the one-way run, just before we started throwing up, they said, “Oh Kayyyyyy, let's run back and git us some niiiiice hot breakkkkk-faaaaast!” So we pushed through our desire to vomit and ran back. That morning some of the guys learned they could run six miles and still live. They pushed through their perceived inabilities.

But on that day on the 13,400 foot mountain when I collapsed, there was no “pushing through.” I had a hard time just standing up and not keeling over again, let alone carrying a backpack and providing leadership.

It's often like that in life. Sometimes we collapse. Sometimes our impure habits knuckle us down, force us to the ground and then twist and humiliate us. In those moments we need a place to go for protection and grace. If you understand what I'm saying about being forced to the ground, then this next Bible verse has got your name on it. ***“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16 - NIV).***

The very, very last place in the universe that Satan wants us to go when we've got the sewage of “impure habits” smeared all over our faces, is to the Throne of Grace ~ because Satan knows what will happen there, is that our Loving Father will clean us up, give us a bear-hug, and say to us what Christ said to the woman caught in the very act of adultery when he said, “I don't condemn you ~ now, go and sin no more.” And after that, we'll be so filled with gratitude that we'll leave the Throne of Grace on the equivalent of a “runner's high,” believing that we actually can run the six miles before breakfast ~ believing that there really is better life without our impure habits ~ and empowered by the love and grace of an Almighty God who will never leave our side.

So, ask for help if you need it. And if you need help ten times, or a hundred times, or a thousand times, it's OK. You can't make God love you more by being extra good; and you can't make God love you less by really screwing up. He just loves you. He wants to forgive and empower

you. Christ died for every sin you have ever done, or will ever do. If you ask for His forgiveness, then it's a done deal ~ you're forgiven.

It's all about grace, and it's all about freedom. And if you know someone else who's struggling with impure habits, come along side them and begin by saying, "I read this story the other day about a guy who was leading a team of people up a 13,400 foot mountain...."

Remember, *your spiritual hydration is directly linked to your proximity to God*. Your battle against impure habits isn't about your strength. It's about God's Spirit in you. The final section of this booklet will be a prayer sequence ~ aimed at helping you.

Staying spiritually hydrated ~ a prayer sequence

There is no "right way" to pray. Some do it with their eyes open; others close their eyes. Some kneel, some sit, some stand, some lay prostrate. Some pray out loud; others silently. When praying, it's best to have someplace where you're alone and can be uninterrupted. Try to have some time every day with God ~ whether it's 5 minutes or two hours.

Begin with **worship**. Praise God for His grace toward you ~ for His amazing power and creativity ~ for His love ~ His justice ~ His mercy ~ His total knowledge of all things including your thoughts and the hairs on your head ~ His patience ~ His plan for your life.

Carry on with **confession**. Tell God all about your sin, your weakness, and even your love of it. Name it ~ don't gloss over. Be specific and graphic. If you fuzz things over, the only person you're tricking is yourself. God sees your sin 1,000% clearly. Confession is about you being honest and humble in the presence of God.

Then spend some time **repenting**. Ask God's forgiveness. Tell Him you're sorry for sinning ~ even if you suspect you may sin again in the same way. Tell Him that to the best of your ability, you want to turn your back on your sin and walk away. Admit that you're weak and that you need His strength. Maybe you need His strength to even be willing to repent for some sin you secretly love. Maybe you don't even want to repent, but feel you should do it. It's all OK. Ask Him to cleanse you from your sin.

Next, **recommit** yourself to obedience. You don't have to promise to be perfect ~ that's impossible anyway. But to the best of your ability, commit yourself to obeying God. Ask Him to help you stay clean and green. This is His gig too – it's not just you alone out there. He's invested in you as your Father.

Thank Him for His presence in your life. Thank Him for forgiving you, through Jesus Christ. Thank Him for the blessings of your life. Name about 15 of them and thank Him for each one.

Pray for His protection. Tell him about the things that tempt you. Tell him about circumstances that make you weak. Ask for His protection and guidance. Ask Him to provide a way out of temptation so you don't have to wrestle with it so much.

The word “Amen” means, “so be it.” OK, got your water? Then shoulder up, let’s move out. We’re going mountain climbing today. We’re gonna see things that God created that are so cool and amazing, that you’ll never forget it. Got your topo and compass? OK, orient yourself to 80 degrees West. That hill over there is actually a fourteener and we’re going to climb it.....