5 Steps to Break Ongoing Sin Patterns

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Do you know people who struggle with recurrent sin patterns? Are you that person, even as a church leader? If so, here are some steps to breaking those patterns.

1. Recognize the spiritual warfare element of the struggle.

   Imagine a "sin line" in front of you. The enemy, the enticer (1 Chron. 21:1), seeks to draw you across the line. He makes sin look inviting, exciting, and satisfying, even as he ensnares with his messages: "Go ahead and do it, nobody will know." "Look at what you're missing. " Everybody else is doing it." So alluring is the sin, and so loud are the messages, that we choose to cross the line.

   Then, the enemy changes his approach. The enticer on one side of the line becomes the accuser (Rev. 12:10) on the other. Here's what it sounds like before and after the sin line, when the encouragements to sin become taunts of accusation:

1. Enticer	Accuser
"Go ahead and sin; God will still love you."	"God will never love you again."
"Just one more time, and you can stop."	"You'll never overcome this sin."
"Don't worry; God will forgive you."	"God won't forgive you this time."

   The enemy dangles the lures in front of us, and we take the bait. Then, in a demonic twist, he turns on us and beats us up with accusations. We accept lies as truth and fall even more into sin that cannot satisfy. If that's where you are, know that the enemy doesn't have to win. Recognize the battle for what it is.

2. Pray for God's deliverance *before* you face temptation.

   That's the way Jesus taught us to pray ("And do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" [Matt. 6:13]), but most of us pray about temptation only *after* we've already failed. We shouldn't be surprised by failure if we don't seek God's help first.

3. Be honest with somebody about your struggles.

   That's a risky step, but we don't overcome sin patterns when we fight the battles alone. Ask God to direct you to someone with whom you can confess your struggle (James 5:16). Then, trust that godly love, restoration, and forgiveness will trump the power of sin (Gal. 6:1).

4. Focus on the glory of Christ.

   When we're caught in a sin pattern, we keep drinking from the well of sin while thinking that our choices will somehow bring fulfillment – only to discover that sin leaves us thirstier in the long run. Only Christ can satisfy the heart, however. When we see Him as the priest who prays for us (Heb. 7:25) and the king who is above every power (Eph. 1:20-23), sin will lose some of its attraction.

5. Repent, and rejoice in small victories.

   That's the bottom line, of course. We must turn from our sin, but God gives us His Word, His Spirit, and His people to lead us to victory. Each time you successfully fight through a temptation, take time to praise the Lord – and remember that every small win is one step closer to victory. I pray that victory will become real for you today.