

Congregational Prayer – It unifies us, even though I do not know you, I am praying WITH you! This morning, we are praying about the Walk for Life happening today at 1pm at KR Barkman Park.

- Pray for women who have had an abortion – hope, healing, forgiveness! To know Jesus!
- Pray for women thinking about having an abortion! For believers to surround them and help them! For them to see their child as an image bearer – a precious life!
- Pray for a law in Canada to protect the unborn!
- Pray for the Church to be part of the answer and solution – standing in prayer, standing for the unborn and to serve and help women who have gone through or thinking of an abortion.
- Pray for people’s eyes to be opened to when LIFE begins IN the womb – Ps 139:13

Let’s Pray

Good morning, my name is Martin Gunter and I am one of the Pastors here at Southland Church and I would like to welcome you all here this morning and also welcome those who join us every week online!! It’s so good to be here and able to share in God’s Word and encourage one another.

Today I want to talk about something that some of us avoid talking about, but yet it is a consuming problem in our churches and communities around the world and right here in Steinbach, and that is addiction! Addiction is defined by Canadian Health as: *A treatable medical condition that affects the brain and involves compulsive and continuous use despite negative impacts to a person, their family, friends, and others.* In other words, it’s a loss of control because we have a dependance on something else.

Now, let me just start with saying this before we really get into it, because of my role here in the church I do see and pray with a lot of people who struggle with many various kinds of addictions, just so you know, I am not singling anyone out here, this is a message for the church, not just one individual. AND with that said, can we all just agree that NONE of us are perfect! WE ARE ALL SINNERS, OK! **Romans 3:23-24 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

Going through the message today, my prayer:

- is that we would have an understanding and burden to PRAY for those who we know are stuck in this bondage of Addiction, saying STOP IT, is not the answer, JESUS is!
- and for those of you who are caught in it, to have to Strength and Courage to fight against this Stronghold in your life, and not simply give up or isolate in your struggle, but to bring this to the light and let others stand with you!

I am not coming to you today as a pastor telling you this, I am coming to you as a fellow addict who has faced this battle, the battle in my heart between Jesus and my addiction to pornography with many defeats in battle. Trying to quit, trying to say “Just STOP it” – making promises to God and breaking all of them, and not knowing how to escape it...

- Addiction leads people at first to an amazing feeling of pleasure or escape, but in the end, just like with all things from the enemy. The devil over promises, and under delivers!

Now addiction is extremely complex and no one can even tell you exactly HOW people get addicted, partly because we are all unique and it's different for many of us. All we can tell you is that it can be one or a combination of genetics, or it can be past trauma, or its mental health, or its environmental factors, and there are very few journeys that are the same, most people are in different stages and intensities of addiction. I do not think it wise to come before you today and tell you take these 7 steps and you will be Set Free, instead I want to encourage you with **building a proper foundation** so that you can start or reinforce in your journey right now, but before we go there, we need to back up a little bit and let's start from another perspective on addiction and I hope this will help you to understand why the steps to laying a foundation is so important instead of dismissing them.

- I think it's only appropriate that we start in Scripture right!?! Now searching for the word "addiction" in scripture will not give you many results, in fact it will give you a result of zero. BUT we see words like temptation, bondage, footholds, strongholds, etc. We get the idea that addiction is not new but has been around for a while. I want to start by sharing from a piece of Paul's life, and we do not know what he was struggling with, let me repeat, we do not know, but this is a passage that really helped me as I was trying to navigate addiction in my life and showed me the answer in the end!! **Romans 7:14-25** *So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. 21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God's law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24 Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.*

Again, we do not know what his struggle was, but I think we can at least resonate with him in what he was going through something big in his life. Agreed! Now I want to place your attention to verse 25 when he brings it back to Jesus, who is the one who delivered him from this sin in his life, and YES, the answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord!!! Now that we established that the answer is in Jesus, where do we go from here? I think its logical to see what Jesus has instructed us to do right!

What is our greatest command here on earth that God gave us? **Matthew 22:24-36** - *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. We are to love the Lord with ALL our heart,*

souls, and mind. NOW, HOW does this help me in my addiction problems? It lies in verse 37, we need to love the Lord our God with ALL your heart, soul, and mind! **The enemy uses addiction to start a tug of war in your heart between that and God and so to give us a divided heart instead of a singular heart focused on Him alone!!**

- Last week Ps Stefan preached a message that if you have not listened to it yet, please go do so because it was an incredible picture of the Wedding Supper and how Jesus is preparing His bride, the church, US! I love this picture that God uses marriage as an example of what relationship with Him looks like because we see in Exodus 20 that we serve **a Jealous God**. He is jealous for our attention, and He wants us to be fixated on Him. And I will admit when I was younger, I really never understood that passage because it seemed like God should not be jealous, until I got married, then it more sense to me. Understanding but a small part of what God must feel like for us in how I feel about Andrea my wife. I want her attention on me, not other men, I want her love for me, not to other guys! And this is but a small taste that God is Jealous for us because He **LIKES US!!! HE LOVES US!!! HE WANTS us to get to KNOW Him BETTER!!** He does not simply want a part of us, He wants the whole thing!! Heart, soul and mind sold out to Him right! So how do you think now coming back to Andrea if her attention is on another guy, what kind of feelings will start coming up in me, how do you think I will feel? Well, I can tell you this much, if that would happen, I will definitely be breaking at least half of the 10 Commandments...
- So now, this is an imperfect comparison, but let's come back to addiction in our lives... **What does addiction do to us? It starts by taking parts of our mind, soul and heart away from God and will start taking more and more territory until it completely consumes us! It will take our hearts and wage war against flesh vs spirit, and we will have a divided heart! Galatians 5:17** *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* Instead of being sold out for the Lord and constantly focusing all my being unto Him, I now focus all those energies on, "How do I get my next fix" or "When can I go so that I can regulate through my addiction" or "New ways of hiding it so that I can get more into my life" Addiction becomes like a cancer that will consume your entire being to the point that it's the **ONLY** thing you will think about and there is nothing left in your heart, soul and mind but the addiction you have been feeding.

A. Addiction is a Cheap Imitation of the Great Command

Addiction in the end, in my opinion, is a cheap imitation of the great command that the enemy is trying to twist for his own gain. Let me tell you, the enemy is incredible smart in twisting GOOD things that God created for us for his own evil desires. He takes sex that is a gift from God and uses it to destroy lives through pornography, rape, std's, affairs, abortion, etc. He uses fortunetelling to twist the prophetic gifts in the church and this is nothing new. Even in Exodus 7 with Aaron when God told him to throw his rod down and it turned into a snake, the magicians did the same, and the enemy will always try and counterfeit what God has made for our good, but thank God as it says in **1 John 4:4** *You, little children, are from God and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.* Our God is Greater!!! Even though the magicians staff did the same, Aaron staff ate them up!

Addiction is a cheap imitation of where the enemy wants us to lay our lives down and worship that addiction and as that addiction consumes us in our heart, mind and soul, it also destroys our lives through us becoming vessels of consumed for darkness where in contrast, when we worship the Lord and we lay our lives down, it gives us life and life everlasting through Him!

- I think we can all agree that Addiction has spread more and grown more intensity over the last couple of years in MANY different areas. It's so hard to keep up even with what is all out there and a little bit of googling this is what I came up with as some of the main ones.

Physical addictions are the ones that are generally better known. These are addictions to substances that are ingested or otherwise put into a person's body. Some common physical addictions include:

- Alcohol
- Cocaine
- Inhalants
- Tobacco
- Marijuana
- PCP
- Opioids
- Amphetamine
- Anxiolytics
- Prescription drugs
- Hallucinogens

Behavioral addiction is classified as any time that one loses control of their actions in order to engage in behaviors that result in brief feelings of happiness. That person becomes dependent on the pleasurable feelings that come as a result of certain behaviors and begins to compulsively act on that behavior.

- Food
- Smart Phones
- Self-harm
- Sex
- Video Games
- Shopping
- Internet
- Work
- Exercise
- Pornography
- Exercise
- Gambling
- Computers
- Social Media
- Codependency

Today I want to mainly focus on **one area of addiction** because honestly is simply too overwhelming to go into all the addictions out there and I am afraid I'll be up here all week trying to cover a portion of them. It makes me feel like a chameleon walking on a pile of M&M's trying to blend in when I look at these lists... Instead, I will be mainly talking about my addiction today, not because I want to, but because I wouldn't be talking to you about theory, but the actual practice and steps I went through when I was dealing with **pornography** in my life! The statistics definitely shows us how addiction have grown and I will show you some in the area of sexual addiction. These are some stats that I took from Pure Desire Ministries:

- 68% of Christian Men struggle with unwanted sexual behavior.
- 30% of Christian Women struggle with unwanted sexual behavior.
 - 91% of men and 60% of women have accessed pornography in the last 30 days.
- 57% of Pastors have past or current struggle with pornography.
- 56% of divorces involve internet use of a partner as a diving factor.
- Pornography addicts are 300% more likely to cheat on their partner.

I think it's safe to say that even in this one area of addiction, we face a problem that we need to address. Again, I do not have the time for us to go through now and explain how we get out of this because, one, not all of us will be going through this now, and two, I would like to focus on pornography, but this morning I want to give you steps to lay a foundation on how to fight addiction in ANY one or more of these I showed earlier.

- Looking at Jesus being our answer, let's look at what else he tells us in scripture.
John 8:31-32 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." What do we need to do to be set free??? ABIDE! This is our first step in laying a healthy foundation in overcoming addiction!

B. 4 Steps to lay a foundation to fight addiction.

1. Abide - Spend time in the Word & Pray.

- **Luke 22:39-41** - Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,
- Abiding in Christ, spending time in His Word and Prayer are 2 incredibly powerful weapons we can use in our arsenal to fight against the enemy and addiction in our lives. Remember how I said in the beginning that Addiction is but a cheap imitation of the great command? So, if the great command is us loving God with all our heart, soul and mind is then we need to set our heart, soul and mind on Christ. How do we set our heart, soul and mind on Christ, by spending time with Him!
- Some of you might ask, well which one is more important, scripture or prayer? Well, someone asked **Charles Spurgeon** this exact question and I love his answer: "*When asked, 'What is more important: prayer or reading the Bible?' I ask, 'What is more important: breathing in or breathing out?'*" Charles Spurgeon
- This is a BOTH/AND where we need to come before the Lord like **2 Chronicles 7:14** - *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* OR how about **Matthew 26:41** - *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Even in the Lord's prayer we get the verse in **Luke 11:4** *Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.*
- Abiding in Christ unleashes a whole arsenal of weapons at our disposal like confession, repentance, deliverance, forgiveness etc. **2 Corinthians 10:3-4** *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.* These we cover in much more at the Set Free Retreat, but we can practice these with others around us, more on this later...
- When we fight anything in our lives, we need to do so on our knees! We battle not with earthly weapons, but with weapons of divine power! As a bonus, when we fight our battles on our knees, this keeps us in a posture of humility before the Lord and opens us up to His strategy for beating it.
- I understand that I am a Pastor, and it might seem like this is what I am supposed to say to you, so I will spare you and we can move onto the second step, so step 2...

2. Don't forget Step 1

- **Colossians 4:2** - Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Or **Joshua 10:8** - Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
- DO not forget our source of life is in our Savior! Keep your eyes fixed on HIM!!! The enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy! He shows no mercy, and he does it when we are at our most vulnerable. What I mean is he is coming for our kids, because that is when we are at our most vulnerable! The enemy does not care about how "innocent" they are. He wants to destroy them! I am not trying to put fear in you this morning, I am trying to warn you about the tactics of our very real enemy that we are fighting!
- We cannot afford to sit idly by and hope that our kids are doing OK, or that one day when I am older, it will be better. We need to be taking steps right now and seeking Jesus' face and interceding for our kids like never before instead of being distracted by our phones or stuck in our addictions! Its time to move from a dived heart to a single heart set on God.
- But some of you might object, and say I have tried it, I have read my bible, and I have prayed, and nothing has changed... You can gladly ask that, but I will have a question in return. For how long have you tried, and did you do it to prove that it does not work, or did you do it so that you can surrender to the will of Jesus and follow His way??
- It's almost like working out, which I am not very good at, I try, but I fail... But what if I go and I say FINE, I'll give working out a chance, and I give it my all for a week and after that week of working out every day for an hour I look in the mirror and go... Well that was useless, I still look the same, and to add to that, I am tired and everything hurts, I can barely move, this is the dumbest thing ever, I am just going back to how I use to live life... Silly right, even I know in my very limited knowledge that if I keep working out, watch my diet and get someone to help me I can become healthy and over time see a difference in the mirror. So why do we treat abiding in Jesus any different? It takes time and let me tell you, when our aim is to go from a Divided to a Single heart, His heart, you will see results you cannot begin to fathom!
- But you might also ask, what do I pray about?? It feels like I am praying in circles... Now you are starting to ask the right questions. Let me give you can important one... Just like we talked about earlier about how the enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy when we are young, this is a great place to start, in our past. Now this is something we teach at the Set Free and you can come and make an appointment with one of us here but in the end its about finding the areas where the enemy has planted lies and we believe those lies today still and its part of our addiction problem.
- For me and my pornography addiction, I tried everything I could get my hands on to stop pornography, got rid of computers, put blockers on, but I would always find a way back. See what I was doing was simply dealing with the fruit instead of the root issue. It's like this, if you have an apple tree and you want to get rid of it, will you just go and pick the apples one by one till the tree dies? NO, that's not how it works, you take an axe to the trunk or better yet deal with the roots and then your apple problem stops. It was the same for me, I kept dealing with the fruit on pornography instead of dealing with the

root, and the root for me was INADEQUACY. Now I was not smart enough to figure this out by myself, this is something that God showed me through PRAYER and it's something that God has showed me to overcome through his WORD! I do not get up in the morning and fight pornography anymore, I get up and I fight inadequacy, not with mere worldly weapons, but by the divine weapons of PRAYER and the WORD and when I fight, I make sure it's on my knees before our Lord and I follow His strategy as its laid out for us!

- **When I have a divided heart when it comes to spending time with the Lord, my time with God will get less and less and more and more distracted, but when we have a single heart towards Him, our times with Jesus become more alive,** our prayers become more meaningful, and the word starts speaking to us in ways we never experienced! Its important that when we go to God in our times connecting with Him that we get rid of distractions, if your phone is causing you to lose focus, leave it in the kitchen, and take the time to practice spending time in His presence, I promise, you will not regret this, and its not wasting your time!

3. **Community** – Be Accountable to one another.

- **James 5:16 - Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.**
- Why confess to one another? Can I not simply go to Jesus with my sins? Yes, you can, but we see here in James that when we confess to one another it brings healing in our lives. When you start your journey towards healing, the first step many times is admitting that you have a problem, and I get this can be very hard especially when you are broken, and you have not even admitted it to yourself.
- I have many times used line: “I am fine!” or “I can stop whenever I want” “I just don't want to now” Freedom can only start when we realize how bad it is, and ask for help in saying: “I have a problem” It takes humility to say that and now to be honest and ask yourself if you are OK with where things are at, or are you going to seek accountability to help you through it. **James 4:6 - “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**
- The enemy would like nothing more than for you to do this journey alone! Its one of his biggest strategies because he knows we are doomed to fail if we do it alone. Its not how God made us, God made us so that we can help one another like **Proverbs 28:13** **Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.** Ps Stefan has said in the past that we are only as sick as the secrets we keep. I think he is right in that, when we keep this a secret, its starts eating away at us and the lines we use earlier like “I am fine” or “I can stop whenever I want to” starts to change to “I am too broken” or “I can never be forgiven for what I have done” or worse yet “I am worthless, there is no hope” – You know, God is amazing, and uses people from all walks to bring Glory to His name and show us through things like phycology that the bible has been right all the time! **Remember James 5:16, confess to one another so that you may be healed,** let me tell you a story:
- **Rat Park:** Conducted in the late 1970s and published between 1978 and 1981 by Canadian psychologist Bruce Alexander and his colleagues at Simon Fraser University in BC, Canada. The where studying addiction and you have to understand

that we know WAY more today than we did back then. See back in the 60's and 70's when drug use really started to kick off, it was the understanding that once you take a drug, you are addicted for life! So, Bruce Alexander and his team started experimenting with rats to see if this was so. The experiment was very simple, they would take rats and put them in a cage with food and water, but they added another container of water with morphine in it. The results were that with in 2 months or so the rats with overdose and die. They tried repeating the experiment with giving the rats better food, or better toys to play with or other various stimuli to see if they would take that over the cocaine. This did not work and in the end they where about to abandon the experiment when Bruce had an idea. What if they took the rats out of isolation and made a big area and put them together in a big cage. Well, it worked, they virtually ignored the morphine water and just focussed on one another. Eventually he took rats that where already addicted in isolation, tossed them in with Rat Park and in the end they would de-tox all by themselves and start integrating into that community!

- Now we are not rats, but if they can come out of addiction from simply being in a healthy community, how much more of us who are a part of the body of Christ? What's our excuse? And please hear me out, I am not saying this is easy... NOT at all!
- Breaking from addiction is one of the hardest things you will ever do! It takes disciplined hard work! It's making that conscious effort of making the next right decision, its not even focusing on tomorrow's battle, it's about facing the battle that is right before you now! Maybe you don't have the energy to fight right now, that's OK, then flee from temptation! Seek out people and build a community around you so that when you hit that low, then you make the right choice by reaching out to them and seek accountability.
- **A divided heart will start to isolate, it will be most comfortable to be alone and deal with the addiction alone, whereas with a single heart, you will pursue accountability,** and with others start by building the right boundaries and disciplines in your life. Again, it can be as simple, not easy, but as simple as you need to choose to put your phone down at dinnertime, spend the time to build into your family instead of spending it on your phone.

4. **My Value is in Jesus alone!**

- Value is a funny thing; I mean who determines what value is and how much something is worth? I mean, I get it with vehicles and practical things, but how does this work?
- **Art Illustration** – Pastor Teena here shared a great illustration with me on value when it comes to art. Do you know what is a very basic way of how they assign value to art? Its in what someone is willing to pay for it! Art has value and certain pieces of art has more value because someone is willing to pay more money for it over another one. I love this illustration because we can some what apply this to our faith and ask the same question, what am I worth in God's eyes.... Let me show you, and you all probably know this one, but its worth repeating...
- **John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

- God assigned a value to us that is immeasurable! He, GOD ALMIGHTY, gave His Son, for us??
- **Psalm 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made** – Notice, not quickly put together, not a mistake, but again, GOD ALMIGHTY, ALL POWERFUL has made you fearfully and wonderful!!
- These verses alone should give us an understanding that we are not mistakes, and that God has placed a GREAT value on us, it's no wonder the enemy works so hard to take that away from us so that he can break us and keep us in bondage.
- One tactic he uses in addition is Shame, not guilt, but shaming us for where we are. Let me explain the difference. Imagine I am driving too fast, and I get pulled over by the RCMP. Guilt will say, I did something bad, I was speeding. Shame says, I am bad for speeding. Get the difference? its subtle, but it's the difference between I did something bad, and I should repent and not speed anymore, to I am bad, now I need to cope with what just happened with me, I am worthless, I am alone, there is no one that is as bad as me... Once there, it's very easy for the enemy to plant more lies, but let me tell you, you are NOT ALONE! Remember, **Romans 3:23** - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – Remember how we started with the example of Paul!
- God wants to Restore you! You are valuable to Him! He wants to use you! And I know when I say that some of you go, but you have no idea how broken I am.... I get it, trust me, how can God use a broken African, who cannot even speak properly who feels confused in a foreign country who is utterly addicted to pornography to do His work?? Impossible!!! BUT GOD!!! Here is the thing, He wants to use you and your story and your experience to help others! **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**
- When we say impossible, I am too broken, God says, OK, I am in the restoration business, and I am the best at restoring all things to My Glory!! He uses us as broken vessels so that we can help others. WHO better that has an alcohol addiction to help someone else who has been there! Or someone who is addicted to social media to help others who are stuck in bondage there now!
- **When we have a divided heart when it comes to our value, we will never be enough! We will always seek out other things to try and give us value, whether it's a "Like" on our posts, or a brief moment of pleasure somewhere else... A single heart that knows its value is not from anything here on earth, but it has divine value from the King or Kings and the Lord of Lords!**

C. What's next? How do I get from a divided to a single heart?

1. **Abide!** – Grow in your Relationship with God! Seek Him and spend time with Him this summer, make a fire, bring your bible, and spend time with Him! And come Join us at The Way on Wednesdays and Saturday mornings at 7am, sign-up online or go ask someone at the Info Desk, they will help you!
2. **Reach out** – build a community around you, they do not automatically happen, it takes time and effort! Join a small group, get involved serving at the church, talk to a staff member! For now, though, come join us in the Prayer Room after the service or email a person on staff and we will pray for you! Its so easy to hide in plain sight and around others, maybe its time for you to take a step and reach out to others, build community and be kept accountable.
3. **Pursue Healing** - Make an appointment to pray with someone.
 - i. **Pure Desire** is coming back in Fall, I am hoping. We are working on doing Pure Desire again in our church to help those who struggle with Pornography Addiction or for those who have been hurt in their relationship by it. More details will coming your way soon, but we will be launching it again late September or early October. IF you want to be on a list or want more information, email us at smallgroups@mysouthland.com and either me or Mallory will get back to you.

Let's close in this last song together and let me pray for you as we go into it. That we will surrender our lives and seek after Jesus with all our hearts, soul, and mind, to find our value in Him alone, and to fight our battles on our knees. **Let's Pray!**