

LivingIntegrated®

FOUR TASKS FOR GETTING YOUR LIFE BACK

TASK THREE: BREAKING A BAD HABIT

The whole presupposition of these Four Tasks is that whatever problematic behaviors have brought you here are habits. And habits can be replaced. But it takes persistent effort. This task brings you to the heart of replacing a harmful habit with healthier practices.

Please note: I think a really useful work that will help you with this task is Charles Duhigg's, *The Power of Habit*, 2012, Random House. I strongly encourage you to read this book.

FIRST: IDENTIFY THE HABIT YOU WANT TO BREAK

Focus specifically on what behaviors you want to be free of. Don't simply generalize it. Don't just think of the consequences you want to avoid.

Be specific and focus on exactly what you want to change.

BECOME A STUDENT OF THE HABIT YOU WANT TO CHANGE.

- Begin noticing when you have the impulse to engage in your habit.
- What are you feeling *just before* you have the impulse for this behavior?
- What do you feel *as you begin* to engage in this sexual habit?
- How does this habit help you?
- And, what does this behavior cost you?

These are important questions. Please take the time to really observe your patterns and think about them. It's worth the effort to identify these answers.

In developing your habits, you've inadvertently acquired cues that prompt you towards your habit, usually without you even being aware. Maybe your cue is a time of day, a part of town or a feeling. In habitual behavior, a cue is a trigger that your brain responds to and automatically begins the habitual routine.

What are the prompts or cues that precipitate you engaging in this behavior? For instance, if it's porn viewing, is there a particular time of day when you usually use porn? What are the common circumstances around your viewing porn?

While not easy, these are important answers to pin down. You'll have to think about it and make some notes. Become a student of your behaviors.

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SECOND: FIGURE OUT THE REWARDS YOU GET FROM YOUR BEHAVIOR

Somehow you've acquired this habit—whether it's porn or other sexual behaviors—and it solves something in your life. This is a really important issue to explore. What does it solve for you?

So, let's say your behavior is porn viewing and masturbating. Is the reward your orgasm?

But what if you view porn but don't masturbate? Or you delay your orgasm for as long as possible?

Maybe the reward is not orgasm, or maybe it's orgasm but not only orgasm. Maybe it's something else, too. Like escape. Or distraction. Think about this.

Being entertained by a stimulus that's interesting enough that you do not have to exert any energy can be a reward. Something like consuming rather than producing. And sex is so stimulating that you can do this for a very long time.

So, what does this behavior give you, solve for you, or what's the benefit you get?

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THIRD: DO YOU EXPERIENCE CRAVINGS TO ENGAGE YOUR HABIT?

Have you found that when you've tried to stop your behavior, you have urges that are difficult to manage?

Ask yourself what the cravings you experience are trying to satisfy. This is similar to figuring out the rewards from your behavior. But it's a little different. You're trying to get upstream in your thinking and feeling.

The thing about having cravings is they don't announce they're coming and they don't tell you what they're really about. It's like our brains are experiencing something negative or difficult or challenging, and they run this nearly undetectable program of 'what will make us feel better' and when they find a previous behavior that satisfied the discomfort, they produce a craving.

So you suddenly feel like you just have to engage in a certain something. And you probably don't even know why.

You want to figure out the why. Maybe it's fear. Or resistance of some kind. Or laziness. Or depression or fatigue. It might be shame. It can be a lot of things and more than one thing.

So try to figure out what your soul and body are wanting when you are not usually even aware. What are the hidden prompts that lead to the cravings?

This is helpful because if you can recognize the upstream dynamics, you can begin to address them and head off the cravings.

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FOURTH: HABITS DO NOT DISAPPEAR. THEY HAVE TO BE REPLACED.

When we talk about breaking a habit, we really mean becoming free of the urge to repeat it. This requires us replacing that habit with something better.

So find out what your habit has been doing for you and then replace the routine of that habit with something else.

If porn is your habit, what does your porn craving satisfy?

Distraction? Then figure out what you're trying to avoid. Can you find a calmer way of facing it? Or is it in your best interest to find something healthier to serve as an object of interest?

Maybe it's simply pleasure. Then find something else that is both pleasing and healthy for you.

Whatever, find a substitute behavior that meets your legitimate needs and do it instead.

Commit to it. Do it repeatedly. This will help immensely to break a bad habit.

MAKE THIS YOUR NEW LIFESTYLE

This habit changing is not easy. You can do it, but it takes commitment and continuing work. You have to keep at it. Bad habits are like weeds. They keep coming back. You have to continually tend the garden of your soul.

Make it a life habit to monitor what your habits are, which ones cause you trouble, which ones waste your energy and develop those that create good things for you.

But you can't do it alone, and we'll address that in Task Four.

SUMMARY ACTION STEPS

- Watch the companion video for Task Three: <https://youtu.be/XsUTgy8pxu0>
- Identify the habit you want to work on and work through the questions to understand the context of that habit.
- Figure out what that habit is solving for you.
- If you experience cravings for your habit, when and why do they hit?
- Identify and commit to a different behavior you can engage in when the prompts for the old habit come up.

A COUPLE OF BIBLE TEXTS FOR THINKING ABOUT OUR SEXUAL HABITS ---

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down
And are acquainted with all my ways.”

Psalm 139:1-3

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:8-9

PRAYER ---

Prayer is a conversation with your Father in Heaven over matters that concern you and him.

*Loving God, I need your help with my thoughts.
My life and every part of me belongs to You.
Help me to manage my life—and especially help me
to understand and direct my thinking,
that I may live a life of calm, love and service.
Amen.*

