



FREEDOM

WITHOUT SHAME

**THIS SHORT GUIDE IS FOR ANYONE WHO HAS EVER ASKED,
“WHY DO I KEEP DOING THE THINGS I DON’T WANT TO DO?”**

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking a few minutes to read this.

We live in a time when change feels harder than ever. Anxiety is rising. Burnout is common. Addiction, habits, and hidden struggles affect far more people than we like to admit.



For a long time, the church has often stayed quiet about addiction and compulsive habits. Not because people do not care, but because it is messy. It does not fit neatly into sermons or quick solutions.

Jesus was never afraid of messy.

He stepped into real lives, real pain, and real patterns that people felt trapped in. He offered truth without shame and grace without denial.

This guide is **not** about fixing yourself. It is about understanding why change is hard and how freedom actually grows.

My hope is that as you read, shame loses its grip and clarity takes its place.

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THE REAL PROBLEM

WHY WE KEEP DOING WHAT WE HATE



Most of us already know what we should change.

The real question is this: If I know better, why do I not do better?

That struggle is ancient. Paul described it this way:

“I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7)

Neuroscience helps explain why this feels so hard.

A well-known daily diary study found that about 43% of people’s everyday actions are habitual, meaning they are repeated in the same contexts and often done while attention is focused elsewhere. [1]

In other words, much of behavior happens before we slow down enough to feel like we are “making a decision.”

Freedom does not begin with more information.

It begins with understanding what is shaping you.

WHY WILLPOWER FAILS

WHY TRYING HARDER RARELY WORKS

MOTIVATION WORKS... BRIEFLY.
THEN STRESS, FATIGUE, OR EMOTION SHOWS UP.



Research on self-control shows that mental energy is limited, and under pressure people often revert to default behaviors. [2]

As energy drops, the brain looks for familiar default shortcuts.

That is why your weakest moments often look predictable:

- late at night
- after conflict
- after a stressful day
- when you feel lonely or bored

Notice these symptoms?

Jesus focused on the source, not just the symptoms

Jesus taught that behavior flows from what fills the heart:
“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34)

Willpower can help you start.
But Willpower is not a long-term strategy.

HOW THE BRAIN LEARNS CHAINS

WHY REPETITION BEATS INTENTION

The brain learns through repetition.

Repeated behaviors strengthen pathways. Over time, actions can feel automatic.



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Repeated behaviors strengthen pathways. Over time, actions can feel automatic.

Scripture uses a different word:

“Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

Chains are rarely formed by one big choice.

They are formed by repeated small ones.

Understanding this shifts the question from

“What is wrong with me?”

to:

“What has been shaping me, and what keeps triggering me?”



WHY SHAME MAKES IT WORSE

THE HIDDEN FUEL OF ADDICTION

Shame feels like it
should motivate
change.

It does not.

Shame triggers a stress response, and stress often strengthens the urge to cope, hide, or numb. Research on shame shows it tends to push people toward avoidance and secrecy rather than real change. [3]

Jesus responded to shame differently:
“Neither do I condemn you.” (John 8:11)

That was not permission to stay stuck. It was the removal of condemnation so change could begin.

Freedom and shame cannot coexist.

Reflection question: What do you do after you fail - hide, punish yourself, spiral, isolate, numb?

What would it look like to respond with truth instead of shame?

WHY TRUTH CHANGES THE BRAIN

RENEWING THE MIND IS NOT A METAPHOR



Your brain learns by repetition.

That is true for habits, and it is true for thoughts. Repeated thoughts can become well-worn mental paths.



Here is the hopeful part: if negative thoughts can shape pathways, focusing on new truths can help reshape neural pathways over time. There is growing research that reveals our brains can change through repeated mental and behavioral practice. New thoughts on repeat are a

simple way to change your mind.

Jesus said it simply:

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

Truth is not just information. Truth is interruption that breaks the loop and opens a new path.

Practical truths to practice when the old thoughts show up:

- I am loved. God is for me, not against me.
- I was created with purpose. My life has meaning.
- My story is not over. Failure is a chapter, not the conclusion.
- I can take one next step today.

What new TRUTH do you need to embrace & repeat?

WHY ENVIRONMENT BEATS MOTIVATION

HOW YOUR ENVIRONMENT SHAPES YOUR CHOICES



Motivation is fragile.
Environment is powerful.

Studies show a small
change in cues can make
a massive difference over
time. [5]

Jesus used vivid language to make this point unforgettable:
“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off..” (Mark 9:43)

Jesus was not instructing self-harm. He was using strong
imagery to communicate urgency: remove what keeps pulling
you back down.

Practical examples of “removing the trigger”:

- Put the phone charger outside the bedroom
- Delete the app you always spiral on
- Do not stock the thing you binge
- Change the route that takes you past temptation
- Stop being alone at the hours you are weakest

Freedom often begins with changing what you allow near you.
What to change? Change your environment.

WHY IDENTITY DRIVES BEHAVIOR

YOU DON'T ACT YOUR WAY INTO A NEW IDENTITY

Many people try to change by starting with behavior. They set rules, make promises, attempt a clean break. Then when they fail, they assume they are hopeless.



But research on Identity-Based Motivation (IBM) suggests something important: people are more likely to take actions when identity is engaged. Difficulty then can be interpreted as a sign that the behavior matters, and encourages us to fight on. [4]

That matters because many chains are held in place by identity statements, even if we never say them out loud:

- This is just who I am
- I always mess it up
- I will never change
- I am too far gone

Jesus regularly spoke identity before behavior.

“You are my beloved.” (Matthew 3:17)

Belonging comes before behaving. Identity shapes action.

WHY FREEDOM REQUIRES COMMUNITY

WHY CHANGE RARELY HAPPENS ALONE



Isolation strengthens chains.

Our brains are wired for connection. Social Baseline Theory argues that safe relationships reduce stress, help regulate emotion, and make hard change more sustainable. [6]

Scripture agrees:

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

Healing is relational. There is a healing when we have active relationship with “each other.”

Isolation does not heal. I may need YOU to find my healing.

Reflection question:

Who is one safe person you could talk to this week - not to be judged, but to be known?

NOTES

A FINAL WORD, PRAYER, AND INVITATION



Change was never meant to be a solo project.

Freedom was never meant to come through shame.

Jesus did not just teach better habits.

- He formed relationships.
- He invited people into community.
- He offered grace before change.

You don't have to walk alone.

At Redemption Church, we are walking through a teaching series called *Breaking Chains: Freedom Without Shame*, where we explore these ideas together in a safe, honest environment.

In March we are kicking off a brand new series called **Well Spent**.



We are going to talk about the stuff we spend every day - time, money, and energy - and why so many of us feel drained, behind, or stuck in survival mode. Most of all, we are going to look at how Jesus leads us into a life that is healthier, freer, and more intentional.

If you need a reset, come be part of it. You are always welcome.

I would like to pray for you.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You that shame does not get the final word.

For the person reading this who feels stuck, bring hope.

For the person who feels tired, bring strength.

For the person who feels condemned, bring grace and truth.

Replace lies with what is true.

Give courage for one next step, and surround them with the right people.

Let freedom grow where shame used to live.

Amen.

Wherever you are as you read this, please hear this: you are not the only one who finds change hard, and you are not a lost cause. God sees you, cares about you, and is already closer than you think.

Our church family at Redemption Church would be honored to walk with you - whether you are just exploring faith or have followed Jesus for years. If you need a reset, come be part of it. You are always welcome.

[Learn more and take the next step here](https://redemptionplano.com/break-bad-habits-plano/)

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SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

This guide draws from Scripture and from well-established research in psychology and neuroscience. These sources are here for anyone who wants to explore more.

[1] Habits and Automatic Behavior

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Free PDF:

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[2] Self-Control Under Pressure

Baumeister, R. F., et al. (1998). Ego depletion: Is the active self a limited resource? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

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[3] Shame and Avoidance

Tangney, J. P., & Dearing, R. L. (2002). *Shame and Guilt*. Guilford Press.

Publisher: (<https://www.guilford.com/books/Shame-and-Guilt/Tangney-Dearing/9781572309876>)

[4] Identity-Based Motivation

Oyserman, D. (2010). Identity-based motivation: Implications for intervention.

Full text (PMC): (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3079278/>)

[5] Environment and Behavior Change (Choice Architecture)

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge*. Yale University Press.

Yale page: (<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300262285/nudge/>)

[6] Relationships and Stress Regulation

Coan, J. A. (2014). *Social Baseline Theory*.

Full text (PMC): (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4375548/>)



FREEDOM WITHOUT SHAME IS JUST A START

If this guide helped you take even one step, we'd love to walk with you as you take the next ones.

You can:

- Watch messages from Breaking Chains: Freedom Without Shame
- Find out what's happening next (including Well Spent)
- Plan a visit to Redemption Church

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