

When Willpower Won't Work

Whether we're talking about dieting, stopping smoking or reducing alcohol consumption, people tend to believe it's all a matter of willpower—an exertion of one's will. In addiction circles, the term “white-knuckling” is common: it refers to TRYING TOO HARD; every day is a struggle.

Binge eaters and bulimic individuals believe themselves to be weak when they try not to give into their impulses around food. They will try really hard, and have some success, and then fall again and feel like failures. Anorexia sufferers are often praised for having such discipline, for having “willpower”. Actually, this often reinforces the behaviors of the disease—behaviors which are not a result of having willpower. They're manifestations of obeying the cruel taskmaster in one's head. We're talking about a compulsion here: ultimately the person is powerless to stop (bingeing, purging, starving, over-exercising, etc.) without help.

So when people enter into the recovery process, desiring to stop whatever-it-is, they get frustrated, *because they are forgetting their power source.*

In Zechariah 4:6, we read, “Not by power or by might, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.” The thing is, willpower cannot match sin's power. Even when we're talking about not gossiping or cursing, our own “will” only gets us so far. It is when we surrender to the power of God's Spirit that we find the strength and power to experience victory.

The apostle Paul writes, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13). He goes on to say in Galatians 2:19-20 that “through the law, I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” The Message translation says it this way: “I was trying to be good; I would be rebuilding the same old barn that I tore down...I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. Christ's life enabled me to do it. The life you see me living is not ‘mine’ but it is lived by faith in the Son of God.”

We see this type of paradox throughout scripture: in losing my life, I find it. In humbling myself, I am exalted. In surrendering, I am victorious. Now THAT's power. —Susan Landry, LPC

