

Just One More

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God at War Series
Ephesians 4:19

Lays Potato Chips used to have an ad that read:

Betcha can't eat just one!

And the Lays Company was right. I mean, how many people eat just one potato chip? You sit down with a bag of chips and say to yourself, "I'm hungry, but I'm just going to eat one chip and then put the bag away." Or there is a bowl of M&M's in your office and you walk by during the day and you say, "I think I will have one M&M for dessert, thank you." One M&M – never more. Or "I will have just one kernel of popcorn at the movies and then I'm going to close the bag and save it for later."

Every one of us understands the "just one more" syndrome. That's why there is a multi-billion dollar industry selling us diets. There is: The Zone Diet, The South Beach Diet, The New York Diet.

I mean, what is the New York Diet? A pound of corn beef and a cheesecake? I mean, the New York Diet? What is that? Lox and bagels, or four slices of pizza?

Then there is The Adkins Diet. There is evening a *Dieting for Dummies* Book.

The diet book industry understands that every human being is subject to this rule of "just one more." Of course we rationalize away our just one more tendencies. I will have a bowl of ice cream now and skip dessert later, or I'll skip dinner later. By the way, you can tell if you have a little bit of an eating problem if you are saying to yourself, "I will have a bowl of ice cream now and I will skip breakfast later!"

The things that I've mentioned – potato chips, popcorn, M&Ms, ice cream, dieting – I could have mentioned watching sports, watching TV, exercising, etc. There is a certain degree of innocence in saying "just one more" for most people. But pushed to an extreme whether we are talking about food for TV watching or shopping, the just one more syndrome would be classified by modern psychologists as "addictions."

I've been doing a series on spiritual warfare. Throughout this series, I've been inviting all of us to recognize that we are not alone in the universe. There are more beings in the universe than simply God and us. I began the series by saying that we in the West, even Christians in the West, have this huge gap in

their thinking between God who lives way up in heaven and we human beings who live on the earth. The Bible speaks about a whole middle layer that has been excluded from contemporary Western thinking. Now the middle layer between God and us that includes angels, demons, and the occult, curses, and blessings, the Bible speaks a great deal about this middle layer. Particularly, it speaks a great deal about the demonic and spiritual warfare.

I believe there is virtually no area in which spiritual warfare has more contemporary relevance than with respect to our addictions. You can't do a series on warfare without talking about the very real problem that we 21st century Americans have with addictions, or what I call the "just one more" syndrome. I've titled today's talk, "Just One More." Let's pray.

The Bible absolutely speaks about addictions and the "just one more" syndrome. We read verses like Ephesians 4:19, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

The apostle Paul is diagnosing every human heart. And what he is saying about our sinful hearts is that we are insatiable. We are infinite consumers. We are always ingesting. Here is what the book of Proverbs says in chapter 30:15-16, 15 "The leech has two daughters. 'Give! Give!' they cry. "There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, 'Enough!': 16 the grave, the barren womb, land, which is never satisfied with water, and fire, which never says, 'Enough!'

To which we would add: There is something else that never says enough – our appetites! Every human being lives with the sense of "just one more" and then I will be satisfied. I want more; I crave more; I need more. Like Bill Murray's character in the old movie "What About Bob?" – I need, I need, I need. Insatiable, always consuming.

It doesn't matter if the object of our appetite is killing us or making us miserable. You talk with a drug addict and say, "Well, how did you get started?" The person might say, "Well, I went through a breakup with my girlfriend and I was really upset. A friend offered me a little pot, so I thought OK I will just smoke a little bit of pot and it made me feel better. I remember at the time thinking, I'm never going to snort any drugs. Putting something in my nose is disgusting. But then I found myself snorting cocaine. But I drew the line and said I am never going to inject myself with a needle. That is what addicts do. But then I wanted to get a little more high. I desired a longer high. And so I decided to inject myself with a needle. I promised myself that I would never share a needle with anyone else. If you share a needle, that's what really makes you an addict. You can pick up the AIDS virus. But I was at a party and I forgot to bring my own needle and so I used a needle that was being passed around. But I vowed I would never steal. I

would never steal in order to get drugs. But now I'm in jail on robbery charges. I don't understand what happened to me."

The Bible lays out exactly what happens in this line of descent. It is the human heart wanting more. Just a little more. No boundary is ever fixed. Every line can be moved. It is what Alcoholics Anonymous calls "Self-will run riot."

That is a really apt description. The human heart is the ultimate consumer. Do you see that in yourself? Today we call this "just one more" syndrome addiction.

Just one more = Addiction

One psychologist said that we human beings are addicts in every sense of the word. We have an insatiable appetite for almost anything. Psychologists list some of the following as common addictions:

- The need for approval
- The desire to be loved
- The need to be right
- Candy
- Friendliness
- Computer Games
- Drinking
- Drugs
- Eating
- Exercise
- Gambling
- Golf
- Hair Twisting
- Ice Cream
- Money
- Nail Biting
- Power
- Sex
- Shoplifting
- Shopping
- Tanning
- Television
- Tobacco
- Work

See yourself anywhere on this list? Just one more...

Now the major model today for understanding addictions is

The disease model

Now the disease model is the controlling paradigm today for people talking about addictions. And it is a useful metaphor in that we can feel controlled by something like alcohol, or food, or sex, or gambling much like a person who has a disease. In other words, you simply can not say to an addiction any more than you can say to a disease, "I'm just going to stop it." You can't say to a head cold or to heart disease, or to cancer, or to high blood pressure, "Well, that's enough of that. I'm just going to make my blood pressure come down."

And illness and disease is used in the Bible as a metaphor for our sins. Isaiah 1:5-6, "Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil."

The problem with the disease model is that what began as a metaphor is now being related to as if it is a biological fact. Many people stop saying that "My addiction is like a disease," and they start saying, "My addiction is a disease." So we start looking around for the biological cause of my alcoholism, or my drug use, or my sexual addiction, or my eating. And at best, what we can come up with is that there might be some inherited tendencies that influence us towards addiction, but according to the Bible none of us as human beings are biologically determined to become addicts. We make voluntary choices along the way, if we say biology is destiny.

It is really important, friends, in all of your thinking to reject determinism as the reason why some one turns out a certain way. Because you can end up blaming God, "Well, God made me this way." Whether we are talking about biological determinism, or economic determinism, or cultural determinism, or family background determinism, we never can say, "I am this way because I am forced to be." Things can influence us, but being human means always having a capacity to choose against our backgrounds. The devil can't make you sin and neither can your economics. Being poor will bring you one set of temptations, but being wealthy will bring you another set. Being abused will bring you one set of temptations, but being constantly affirmed will give you another set of temptations. Being raised as an American will create one set of temptations, being raised in Japan will create another set of temptations.

Of course, a wise counselor wants to explore someone's background. Of course, we want to pay attention to the life situation that someone is raised in. But none of these things cause addiction. They may influence. But we are never determined. That is the weakness of the disease model. We catch a disease wholly apart from any choice. We enter an addiction by choosing. The fact is no one has an unavoidable destiny as anyone who has been through recovery can tell you.

Let me suggest a much more helpful biblical paradigm for understanding addiction.

The idolatry model

The Bible understands the “just one more” syndrome that we call addictions by primarily warning us about the dangers of idols. Now the word “idol” sounds particularly strange to the ears of a 21st century American. We do speak of idols when dialing in our votes for Sanjaya on American Idol, but that is not an addiction. We sometimes talk about sports idols, or rock idols, but for the most part we Americans don’t use the word “idol” very much.

Have you ever noticed, however, how often the Bible warns us against worshipping idols? We see it in the first two of the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:7-10

“You shall have no other gods before me. 8 “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 10 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The Bible constantly warns us against idolatry. The very last verse of the book of 1 John says this in 1 John 5:21, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Now when we think of idols today we think of some primitive object of wood or metal worshipped by some pre-modern tribe. But in the warning against idolatry, the Bible is not merely talking about objects of wood, stone or metal. The Bible certainly warns us against those in many places. And then, of course, we don’t have to worry about making an idol out of something made of metal like – our cars; or turning something made out of wood or stone into an idol – like our houses. Fortunately, making an idol out of metal, wood or stone is something that primitive people used to do, not sophisticated Americans today. Right?

But the Bible’s emphasis is, as I said, not primarily on idols made of metal, wood, or stone. The Bible focuses on idols of the heart. Here is what we read in Ezekiel 14:3, “Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

Idolatry is a wonderful way to think about addictions because what we are doing with respect to any addiction – sex, food, the desire for people’s approval, the need to always be liked, alcohol, dieting – what we are doing is we are setting our affections and our hopes for a better future on something other than God. We turn to an idol with the express purpose of this idol is going to give me what I

want, what I need, what I desire right now. This piece of chocolate cake, this looking at pornography, a pat on the back – it's going to give me that pleasurable feeling, that sense of comfort, a better self-image, a feeling of release from boredom, a sense of control. Whatever it is that we are looking for, I'm going to go to that activity, I'm going to go to that substance, and the idol will secure it for me.

We go to idols with the express purpose of manipulating the idol to get us what we want. We don't go to idols with the idea that we are going to be ruled by idols. We go to idols with the notion that we are going to rule the idol. The idol is going to give me a feeling of being loved, or a feeling of being satisfied, a feeling of being in control of my life, a feeling of release.

But here is the problem. Our idols don't cooperate with our desire to rule them. And so, instead of you being the master of your idols, or me being the master of my idols, we find ourselves mastered by our idols. We are ruled. After a period of time of giving our hearts and our affections and pinning our hopes on this particular idol, we find ourselves enslaved by it. We can't stop, even if we want to. We begin to lose our freedom. Rather than controlling, we are controlled. Rather than ruling, we are ruled. Rather than being masters, we are slaves.

Why are we warned over and over about idols. Because God knows that behind idols which are lifeless, dumb pieces of wood, metal or pictures and images, or objects like food and activity, like TV watching, or another person – your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your children, your husband, your wife, your dad or mom's approval – God knows that behind every idol is Satan himself. Here is what we read in 1 Cor. 10:18-20,

1 Corinthians 10:18-20

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

Why the warnings? Let me use some alliteration here – the five D's.

Idols demonize us.

Idols demonize us

The reason why you struggle so much with your addiction is because behind this particular addiction is a demonic power. You are warned away from idolatry because the idol is just a mask for something way more sinister – a spiritual being that wants to put a hook inside of you, to gain a foothold in your life, to rob you of your freedom and your joy. I will talk more about this issue of

demonization next week. But all of us, addicts, non-addicts, we are all worshippers, we all give ourselves body and soul to something or someone. We all pin our hopes on something or someone. We are all looking for comfort and love and a sense of security, relief and release from something or someone. And either we look to God or we look to an idol. And when we look to an idol, behind that idol is a demon.

It is this idea of demonization that Alcoholics Anonymous really understood when it speaks about the whole issue of being a dry drunk. Have you ever heard that term – that someone is a dry drunk? Do you know what that means? It means the same power, the same demon that drove a person to drink, if they aren't dislodged in a person's life by Christ, those same powers will drive a person towards some other addiction – smoking, food, or explosive anger. If the house is not cleaned out, and if we don't get a new master namely Jesus Christ, even if we get rid of one slavery we will replace it with another one. Idols demonize us.

Idols disappoint us.

Idols disappoint us

We read this in Isaiah 1:29-31

Isaiah 1:29-31

"You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen. 30 You will be like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water. 31 The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire."

You see, idols always come to us making enormous promises. Turn to me, look at me, fondle me, drink me, use me and I will give you what you want. I will give you the feeling of success, or power, or love that you are seeking. But it is always a lie – at least in the long term. Here is the way it works. Ephesians 4:19, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."

Initially, the idol does deliver. A person does get a sense of comfort, or love, or release, or power. And often that comes very quickly. The first time someone uses a drug or looks at pornography, it's like, "WOW! That is unbelievable." But then we reach a level of tolerance and we need more. As Eph. 4:19 says, we need more to get the same impact. And then more, and more. And eventually with many folks they have to turn to that thing just to get out of bed in the morning. The pills no longer produce a high. The pills are necessary just to wake up and not have a splitting headache.

God is exactly the opposite. With God very often we seek him and seek him and we have very little benefits. It is like we push the rock uphill and it is really hard work and very little production. But then things change. The grade changes. The rock starts to move a little bit with less pushing. And then the grade slopes down even more and the rock starts rolling and it is as if we are not pushing at all. You turn to an idol and it has immediate short-term payoffs and long-term disappointment. You turn to God and there is very little short-term payoff, and long-term satisfaction, peace, and joy. Idols disappoint us.

Idols devour us.

Idols devour us

We read in 1 Pet. 5:8, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Ultimately anything that we attach ourselves to, pin our hopes on, reach into for meaning and comfort and purpose in life will devour us. Because behind it there is a demon. It will devour our freedom. It will devour our human spirit.

C.S. Lewis, in one of my favorite books on spiritual warfare called *The Screwtape Letters*, quotes a demon speaking about human beings. He says:

We want cattle who can finally become food. God wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in; he wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; God is filled and flows over.

Have you ever felt yourself devoured, eaten alive, utterly consumed by something or someone that's killing you? Talk with a person who is involved in an adulterous affair. You say, "Why did you throw everything away in order to pursue this affair? You threw away your relationship with God. You threw away your Christian reputation. You threw away your ministry. You threw away your marriage. You threw away the respect of your kids. Why did you throw it all away?"

There is no rational answer. Sin is ultimately irrational. It doesn't consider the consequences. It just says, "I want more. I want more." That's what the film director, Woody Allen, said when he left his wife and married his stepdaughter who was 30 years younger than him. He said, "The heart wants what it wants." And so everything outside of God's will is seeking to devour you.

Idols hide in the dark.

Idols hide in the dark

You say, “I don’t know if something in my life is an idol. I don’t know if I’m really attached to this thing, or pinning my hopes on it. I don’t know if this thing, this activity, this person is really a God-substitute. I don’t know if I’m really bowing down and worshipping it.”

Here is a good test. Do you hide it? Do you sneak it? Are you ashamed of it? Do you have to keep it out of the light and out of the sight of other people? So you are sneaking food, or throwing up food, or more pain medication than you should take, or just another drink, or just another peek, or just another phone call. Anything, friend, that you feel compelled to keep in the dark, is probably an idol.

Let me ask you a personal question: Is there anything in your life that you feel compelled to keep in the dark? Anything come to mind? Is it an idol that God wants you to turn from?

And idols defy us.

Idols defy us

If it is an idol, it won’t take no for an answer. If you have given yourself over to something – the pursuit of money, shopping, being approved of – that thing will not take no for an answer. It will defy you. You always know when something is an idol if it won’t take no for an answer and you begin to make excuses. You say:

- “I want to stop worshipping this idol, but I want to do it without much effort. I want it to be easy.”
- “I want to stop worshipping this idol, but not at the cost of saying no to something that gives me comfort.”
- “I want to start saying no to this idol tomorrow, but not today.”
- “I want to start saying no to this idol, but first God has to remove my craving.”
- “I want to stop worshipping this idol because I am unhappy, but I don’t want God to be the sole replacement of this idol.”
- I want to stop worshipping this idol. I’ll do so by cutting back.

Do you recognize yourself in any of this?

So, what are we to do with these disappointing, devouring, demonizing idols? The Bible says tear them down! In Matthew 11:12 we read, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people take it by force.”

And in Matt. 18:8 we read this: “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.”

We need to be passionate in our fight against idols.

We need passion

We need to be ruthless. You need to stop accommodating or making compromises with your idols. Tear them down. You know, the life that Jesus wants us to enjoy, the life of the kingdom, is only laid hold of by people who are ruthless with themselves and ruthless with their idols. The kingdom is taken by force.

Do you know why most of us never really experience the life of the kingdom? We never come to a place in our whole Christian lives of experiencing what Peter talks about – joy unspeakable, and full of glory, or what the apostle Paul talks about – the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, in another place Paul speaks about peace that passes all understanding. Do you know why we don't enjoy the life of the kingdom?

It is because we accommodate, we make peace with, we compromise with the idols in our lives. We clear out a few, but not all. We set limits, but don't eliminate. We cut back, but not cut off. Jesus tells only forceful, passionate, violent people can ever lay hold of the kingdom. In other words, in line with our series, we have to declare war in tearing down all of our idols. And in declaring war with our idols, we need perception.

We need perception

That is the second thing. We need God to reveal to us the deepest issues in our hearts.

Lord, I keep turning to food as an idol, but what is the idol of my heart? What am I craving that causes my out of control eating? Is it love? Is it comfort? Dieting is not going to meet that deep craving. I'm just going to turn into a dry drunk. When we turn to something else for love and comfort, if I don't turn to you God, then what is it that you are seeking? What is the idol of the heart that you are going after through sex, pornography, or excessive TV watching, or shopping, or constant work. We need to pray: Holy Spirit, reveal the idols of my heart.

And we won't tear down these idols when they are revealed without power.

We need power

We need a power greater than the power of idols. Jesus said in Luke 11:21-22 these words: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder."

We know that behind idols are demonic forces. These demonic forces are stronger than our reason. That's why even when you know something is wrong and you argue the case out with yourself, you still do it. These demonic forces are stronger than your tears. That's why even when the thing depresses you and discourages you, you still do it. These demonic forces are stronger than your will power, that's why even when you try to push against them and say "no" they defy you.

The only one that is strong enough to defeat the power of idols in our lives is Jesus Christ. Christ is the Higher Power! He can attack and over power the evil one. And how does he do that? Let me suggest a power that is stronger than any idol you worship. It is the power of grace. Titus 2:11-14:

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The grace of God teaches us to say no. The power of grace sets us free. Grace in the Bible is loaded with meaning. Grace deals with our past – the shame of sins we've committed. We need to stay before the cross long enough to receive true forgiveness for our past idolatry.

But I need present grace. The way that works out practically for me is I invite Jesus, the Lord and Dispenser of grace, to step into the cravings of my heart and to fill me once I've discerned what I'm craving. I'm craving comfort, Lord Jesus, I invite you into my heart and welcome your comfort. Lord Jesus, I need to be affirmed. Will you speak words of love to me. Lord Jesus, I'm looking for a sense of control, I'm bored – whatever it is that drives you to do what you do, welcome Jesus into the very center of that thing. I tell you – the power of that idol in that moment will be broken.

And then you look for future grace. Pray this: "Lord, give me a vision of the kind of man or the kind of woman that I can become, if my idols are torn down. Fill my heart with hope that I could begin to enjoy the life of the kingdom. That I don't have to live this life. I can be better than I am; kinder than I am; freer than I am; more secure than I am."

Passion, perception, power – perseverance, that's the fourth thing.

We need perseverance

We need perseverance if we are going to tear down idols. Matthew 24:13 says this: "But whoever stands firm to the end will be saved."

Friends, the Promised Land that the Israelites were brought into wasn't taken in a day. It wasn't taken in a year. Our problem is that we want instant freedom. We want every idol torn down right this moment. We want all the cravings to stop. We want freedom, but we want it in pill form. And that's not the way Christian growth happens. Christian growth is always a process. We must welcome the long-term process of change in our lives. It is: "Father, I didn't get here in a day. I've been grooving out this path in my life for months, years, decades. I will not demand instant and final liberty this moment."

Only God can give us a significant measure of freedom through a deliverance from a demon that has attached itself to us. But even then there is a long-term fight, a long-term commitment to keep tearing down the idols.

We need passion. We are violent; we declare war against our idols. We are perceptive. We say, God show me what is driving my cravings. We need power. Lay hold of the power of grace. We persevere in our fight. It is not a momentary thing for just today. I'm going to keep at this for the rest of my life. Finally, we publicize what we are committing ourselves to do. We need to publicize it.

We need to publicize

In James 5:16 we this: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

You can tell that you are serious about tearing down an idol in your life when you communicate what the idol is to someone else and you communicate the plan you have to tear it down and you welcome that person to hold you accountable. Until you are serious enough to publicize the plan, you are not serious enough to tear down the idol.

God has arranged things so that his grace comes to us through the hands, encouragement and prayers of each other. Most of what we need by way of freedom from our idols will come to us through other members of the body. That is the reason we have recovery groups here. That is the reason we have support groups. And by the way, if you want to find out do we have a recovery group, a support group, a prayer group regarding a particular issue that you are struggling with, just go online and type in www.vineyardcolumbus.org and it will list all the groups we have.

Idols never satisfy. Addictions never fill us. We will always be left with the feeling of just one more. Only Jesus makes us a promise that will never

disappoint us when he said to the woman who had been married four times and was now on her fifth husband, these words in John 4:13-14:

John 4:13-14

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Let's pray.

I. The Pervasiveness of Just One More

II. The Paradigm of Addictions

- A. The Disease Model (Is. 1.5, 6)
- B. The Idolatry Model (Dt. 5.7-10; I Jn. 5.19; Ezk. 14.30)

III. The Purpose of Idols

IV. The Problem With Idols

- C. Idols Demonize Us (1 Cor. 10.14, 19, 20)
- B. Idols Disappoint Us
- C. Idols Devour Us (1 Pt. 5.8)
- D. Idols Hide in the Dark
- E. Idols Defy Us

V. The Pulling Down of Idols

- A. We Need Passion (Mt. 11.12; Mt. 18.8)
- B. We Need Perception (Ezk. 14.30)
- C. We Need Power (Lk. 12.21,22; Tit. 2.11-14)
- D. We Need Perseverance (Mt. 24.13)
- E. We Need to Publicize (Jas. 5.16)