

The Spiritual Truth

Yo-Yo Behavior Reveals Selfishness

So what hope is there for maintaining self-control when it's based on emotions that are fleeting? The better question is: If people do something out of fear and/or guilt, then *whom* are they doing it for? Themselves, of course! So all such cost-benefit analyses are selfish and ultimately boil down to "what's it gonna cost or benefit *me!*" Our traditional solutions to problems of self-control are just as bad – we try to remind ourselves of the fear or guilt in order to maintain motivation.

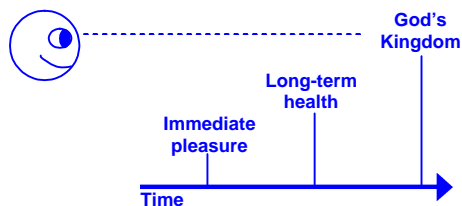
True Self-Control is from the Holy Spirit

There is a hope – it's found in Jesus Christ. He knows we're all weak and sinful. That's why he not only saves us, but he gives us the Holy Spirit to help us. Galatians 5:23 teaches that self-control is one of the fruits, or beneficial evidences, of this Spirit. But it also goes on to say that:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (5:24)

So when you accept Jesus Christ, you receive a new *motivation* – not for yourself but for God's kingdom! "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). You don't even own your body any longer – God does – so you are called to "glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

True self-control, therefore, comes from learning to choose the needs of God's Kingdom over your own needs, even your long-term health (just ask the thousands of Christian martyrs). It is motivated by the joy, thankfulness, and power that come from the indwelling of Holy Spirit in the believer's heart.



Renewed Hope for Lasting Change

Let's revisit those yo-yo cases from the previous page and make some recommendations.

- Suzie – she should quit smoking for the sake of God's Kingdom. First, since God owns her body she should treat it with care. Second, by prolonging her life, she prolongs the time she has to do Kingdom work such as witnessing to others. Third, by quitting smoking she is a more effective witness and church participant, since the issue of smoking is one that weighs heavily on the personal consciences of many.
- Ron – (Note: one might think that Ron could not be a Christian, yet many who profess to be believers also commit violence.) He needs to open his eyes to see how terribly he has damaged the spiritual health of himself and everyone close to him. His work for God's Kingdom has been rendered impotent. He should begin a close accountability relationship with his pastor, confessing and repenting of all the pain he has caused his family (or else his church should initiate excommunication and his family should seek protection).
- Sandy – she likely needs to restructure not just her daily schedule but her entire life to be more effective for God's Kingdom. The fervent hunger for God's leading can only come from the heart of a believer who is on the front lines of Kingdom work every day.
- Gary and Melissa – they need to reorient their lives toward God's Kingdom by simplifying their estate. Not only is it hard for rich people to get into the Kingdom, it's difficult for them to do any Kingdom work because their heart is on their treasures. This couple needs to sell what they don't need, commit to regular tithing, and begin pouring their God-given income into Kingdom work for Him.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Spiritual Truth About The Yo-Yo You



Why Bad Habits are so Hard to Break

The Truth About Spiritual Ups and Downs

How to Make Commitments That Will Last

A ministry of Hanover Fellowship Church, Hanover, PA
www.hanoverfellowship.org
Copyright © 2004 Chuck Cruise

Are You a Yo-Yo?

You've heard about yo-yo dieters – their weight fluctuates between two extremes because they can never stick to their diet very long. There are, however, countless other areas of our lives where we experience these same ups and downs:

Good Commitments That Don't Last

- Health – exercise, dieting, smoking cessation
- Spiritual – prayer, Bible reading, attending church
- Money – spending less, saving more, paying toward retirement
- Relational – anger reduction, nonviolence, sexual abstinence, fidelity
- Time – spending less time at the office, spending more time with family

Bad habits are so hard to break. Good commitments are so hard to keep. What's a person to do?

From the Author

Been there, done that – I'd been a yo-yo all my life. Like Paul, I cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). I'd also personally been impacted by the many failures of those around me who struggled to manage their eating, drinking, smoking, and spending. It's enough to make someone lose hope.

But God's Word, as always, came through with the answer. Paul taught me that through Jesus Christ I am no longer a captive to the law of sin which rules my flesh, but I am set free to serve the law of God with my mind (Romans 7:25).

You don't need the advice of Oprah or the gimmicks of psychology to find consistency in your life. You need Jesus Christ. Read on – I'll explain.

- Chuck Cruise

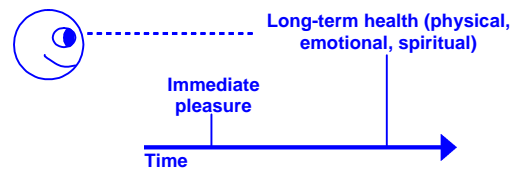
The Key to Yo-Yo Behavior

Urgency is the key to yo-yo behavior. For example:

- Suzie's doctor tells her she has lung cancer. Suzie vows never to smoke again. After a year of successful chemotherapy, Suzie begins to smoke again. Why?
- Ron hits his children when he is angry. After breaking his boy's arm in a fit of rage, he vows never to be violent again. Months later, after the arm has healed, he resumes his violence. Why?
- Sandy comes home from a weekend women's retreat vowing to pray and read her Bible for 30 minutes every day. She keeps it up for a month, then goes back to her old pattern. Why?
- Gary and Melissa charge so much to their credit cards that one month they have to borrow money from their parents to meet their house payment. Embarrassed, they cut up their credit cards and vow never to spend on credit again. Three years later, they are back in the same mess. Why?

All these people had the following things in common:

- 1) **They meant their vows sincerely.**
- 2) **They demonstrated self-control for a while.** They chose long-term health over immediate pleasure (nicotine high, anger release, free time, spending money).
- 3) **They ultimately failed. Why? Because their self-control was motivated by urgency.** What happens when the urgency is gone? The vow is gone!



The Emotional Truth

Urgency comes in two flavors: **fear** and **guilt**.

FEAR

People can control any behavior when they are afraid enough of the consequences (even a die-hard drug addict can resist shooting up while a policeman is nearby). In most of the examples in the preceding column, people attained self-control out of fear:

- Suzie was afraid of dying
- Ron was afraid of doing physical harm to his son (and probably also of getting caught)
- Gary and Melissa were afraid of being exposed as irresponsible, and possibly of losing their home

But people acclimate to fear pretty quickly, especially the further they go in time from the initial shocking event. So after months of being afraid of dying, Suzie no longer felt the same degree of fear. Ditto Ron and Gary and Melissa.

The nation of Israel is a Biblical example. Look at all the times God sent slaughter, sickness, pestilence and destruction to prompt them to obedience, yet they soon fell back into their old idolatrous patterns every time.

GUILT

Guilt is fear's weaker sibling. People acclimate to it more quickly because it is easier to rationalize away. For example, Sandy's experience at the women's retreat made her feel guilty that she wasn't spending more time with the Lord. In a moment of soul-searching, she saw clearly how out of whack her priorities were. But then Monday morning came and Sandy began convincing herself of all her old excuses again.

The way most people today rationalize guilt away is through convincing themselves that they are victims. Victimization gives a sense of entitlement – victims feel it's ok to choose the immediate pleasures at the sacrifice of their long-term health. They convince themselves that it's their compensation. So Sandy says to herself, "I work hard all day for other people – I'm entitled to some 'me' time." Bye-bye guilt!