

Overindulgence

August 1995

Too much of a good thing *can* be harmful. Consider this all-too-common scenario: A young man practices and trains with the greatest degree of sacrifice and self-discipline to reach the pinnacle of his sport. Once there, he signs multi-million dollar contracts to perform and to endorse products.

The obligations of stardom begin to make time and energy sapping demands: media interviews, corporate promotions, parties, expanded business deals, etc. So seductive is fame, so lucrative is success that one would be a fool to say “no” to a fawning public.

Practice? *“Later; I’ve got a plane to catch.”* Exercise? *“Not now; I’ve got to do ‘Larry King Live.’”* Wife? Kids? *“Gotta work on my new book to pay for my 300 bazillion-acre ranch.”* How many times must society see a sports star ruined by drugs, sexual scandal, gambling or divorce before it ditches excuses and admits the obvious? *Overindulgence is destructive.* Its very nature undermines the qualities of character and behavior that are necessary for a happy, productive life.

The New Testament repeatedly counsels self-control, moderation, and balance. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) and a facet of Christian character (2 Pet 1:6). Self-discipline was the perpetual objective of none other than the apostle Paul: *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Cor 9:27).

And in a passage tailor-made for the modern athlete: *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there”* (Jas 3:16).

While few of us can comprehend private jets, multiple mansions, and White House fêtes, overindulgence is not restricted to the wealthy. *Anything* to which a Christian surrenders his self-control is an idol, be it a Marlboro, a Playboy, a Hostess Twinkie or the idiot-box (and who is the bigger idiot these days, the characters on television or those who watch without an ounce of discretion?)

Those who have achieved success usually see themselves as having earned the right to be greedy and self-gratified. Christians, however, as recipients of God’s grace, understand that they deserve only death and that *“denying ungodliness and worldly lusts ... should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age”* (Tit 2:12). May we thrive on a diet of self-control.