
Why Men Get Stuck

Addiction, the Brain, & Biblical Hope

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AWAKEN MEN'S SPIRITUAL TUNE-UP • OCTOBER 3, 2026

The question underneath the struggle

“If I know this is hurting me, why do I keep doing it?”

We often assume

- I need more willpower
- I should know better
- If my faith were stronger, this would be easy
- I just need to stop

What science tells us

- The behavior serves a function
- The brain learns what brings relief
- Cues can trigger automatic responses
- Stress narrows our choices

What healthier living requires

- Truth without condemnation
- Skills, structure, and practice
- Connection instead of secrecy
- Hope grounded in a larger purpose – ***Serving God***

Getting stuck is understandable. Staying stuck is not inevitable.

Men can get stuck in many places

Different behaviors. Similar learning processes.

Pornography

- Escape
- Boredom

Gambling

- Excitement
- Hope
- Loss chasing

Alcohol / Drugs

- Relief
- Numbing
- Belonging

Social Media / Video Gaming

- Distraction
- Stimulation
- Connection

The behavior is not the whole story.

Ask: “What does this behavior do for me—especially when life gets hard?”

How Much Time Can These Behaviors Take?

ALCOHOL

≈ 1-2
hours/session

\$228 - \$316 billion

PORNOGRAPHY

≈ 1-2
hours/week

\$52 billion

SPORTS BETTING /
GAMBLING

≈ 1.5-3
hours/session

\$300 billion

GAMES / LEISURE
COMPUTER

≈ 48 min/day

\$61 billion

SOCIAL MEDIA

≈ 1.5 to 3 hours
per day

\$126 billion

CANNABIS

≈ 1-3
hours/week

\$44-47 billion

The question is not only “How much?” — How are my behaviors replacing, this hurting my relationship with God?

Are Men Making Time for Prayer?

37%

**of U.S. men report
praying at least
daily**

Recent Pew Religious Landscape Study

60%

**U.S. Christians
pray daily**

72%

**Evangelical Protestants
pray daily**

What gets the first minutes of your day?

Phone • Email • News • Gambling • Pornography • Social Media?

How do we grow intentional time with God?

Lord, I don't know what lay before me today, but I commit it all to You. Please give me strength and courage to get through the joys, challenges and happenings of the day. I thank You for my life and for all that I have; I commit this day to You. No matter what happens, I know You have me in the palm of Your hand. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Great American Journal

Prayer as a Daily Practice

Prayer can create an intentional pause between an urge and a response.



CENTER Slow down and redirect attention.

CONNECT Move from isolation toward relationship with God.

REORIENT Reconnect behavior with values, commitments, and identity.

RESPOND Create space to choose rather than automatically react.

START WITH

10 MIN



70 min/week



≈ 61 hours/year

Be centered on prayer

Why men, specifically, can stay stuck

The pressure to handle it alone

- Self-reliance can become isolation.
- Emotional control can become emotional avoidance.
- Endurance can become waiting too long to ask for help.

The cost of silence

- Distress stays hidden.
- Coping shifts toward private, fast-acting behaviors.
- Shame grows when the public self and private life diverge.

A better definition of strength

- Name what is happening.
- Ask for help early.
- Let trusted men know the real story.
- Practice courage through honesty.

“Bear one another’s burdens...” — Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

The behavior usually solves something—briefly

STRESS

“I need relief.”

LONELINESS

“I want connection.”

BOREDOM

“I need stimulation.”

REJECTION

“I want to feel wanted.”

SHAME

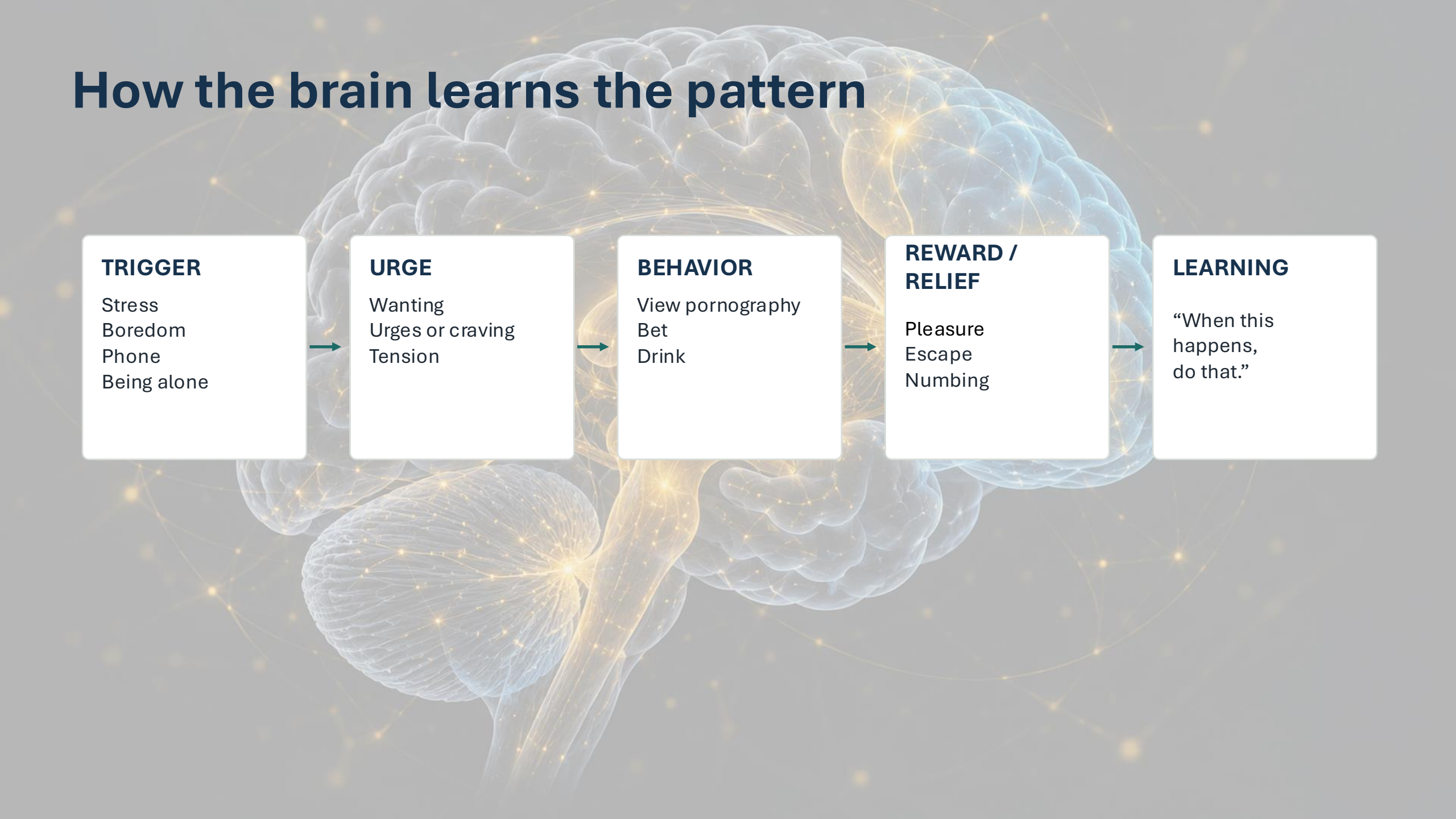
“I want to escape myself.”

PAIN / TRAUMA

“I want this feeling to stop.”

Short-term relief can reinforce a behavior even when the long-term consequences are severe.

How the brain learns the pattern



TRIGGER

Stress
Boredom
Phone
Being alone



URGE

Wanting
Urges or craving
Tension



BEHAVIOR

View pornography
Bet
Drink



REWARD / RELIEF

Pleasure
Escape
Numbing



LEARNING

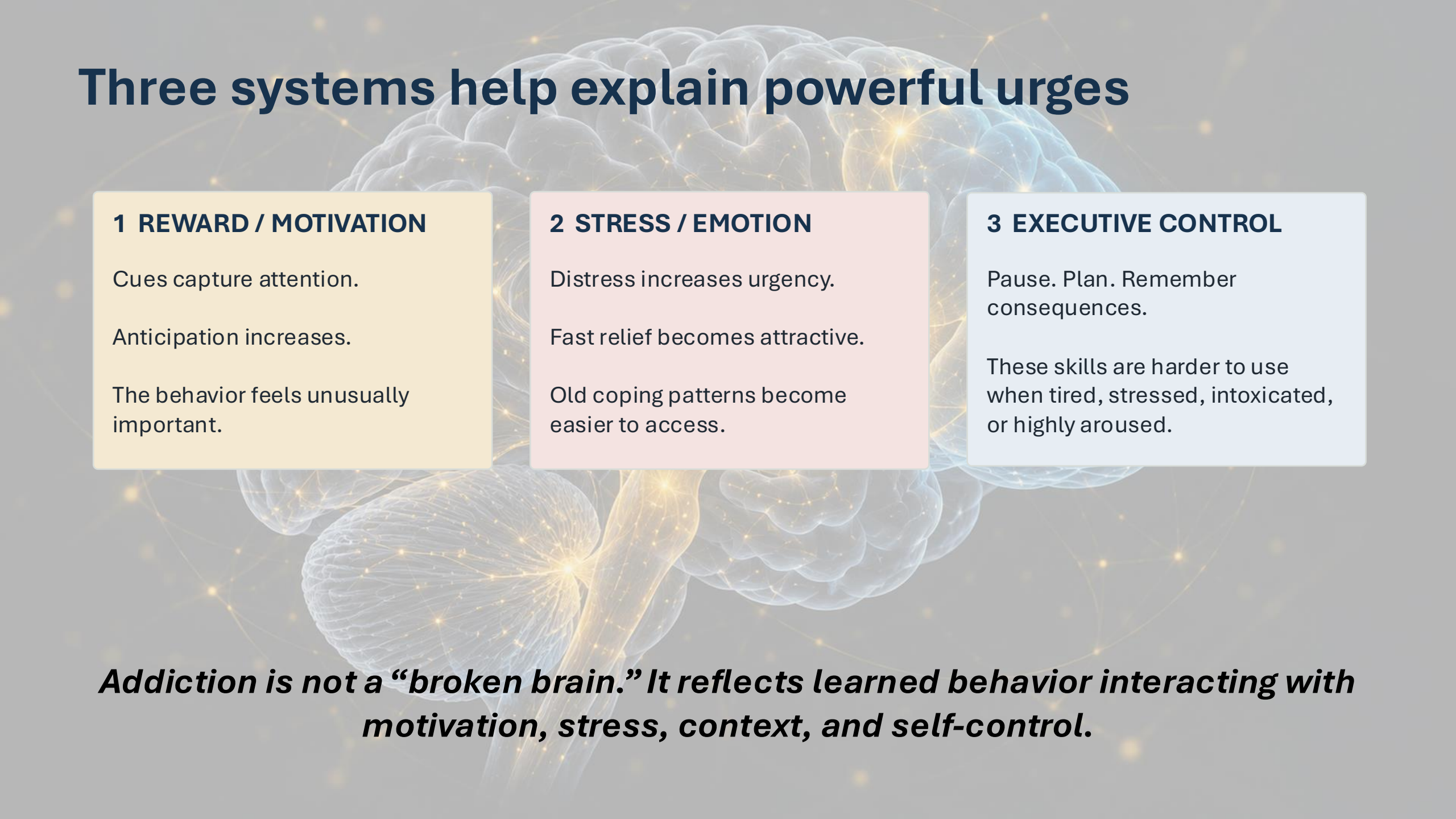
“When this
happens,
do that.”

Dopamine: More about “wanting” than happiness



With repetition, “wanting” can become intense even when the behavior is no longer especially satisfying.

Three systems help explain powerful urges



1 REWARD / MOTIVATION

Cues capture attention.

Anticipation increases.

The behavior feels unusually important.

2 STRESS / EMOTION

Distress increases urgency.

Fast relief becomes attractive.

Old coping patterns become easier to access.

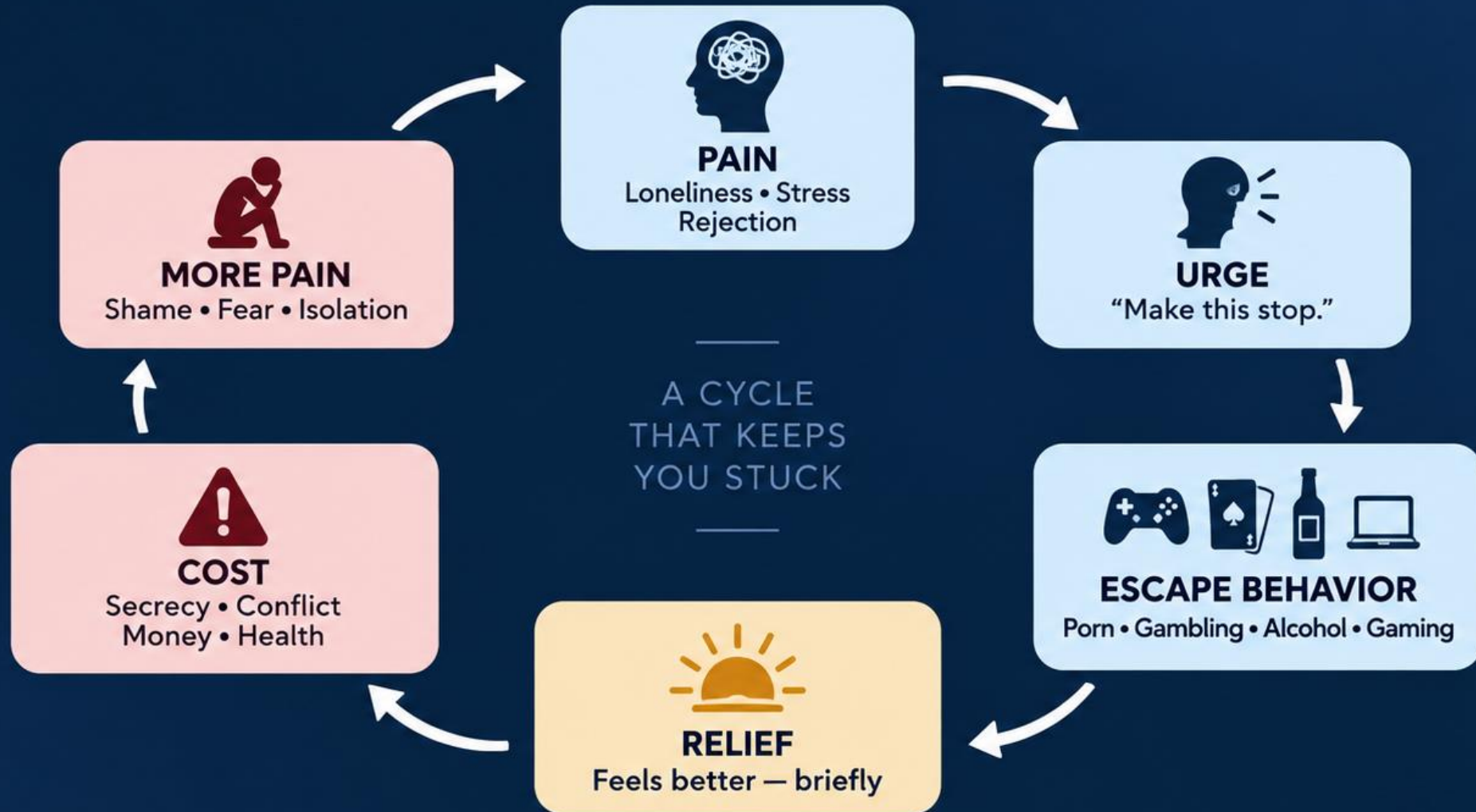
3 EXECUTIVE CONTROL

Pause. Plan. Remember consequences.

These skills are harder to use when tired, stressed, intoxicated, or highly aroused.

Addiction is not a “broken brain.” It reflects learned behavior interacting with motivation, stress, context, and self-control.

The trap: Relief now, **cost later**



What works in the **short term** can make the problem worse in the **long term**.

Shame can keep you stuck

SHAME / SECRECY

“If people really knew me...”

Hide → isolate → ruminate → seek relief → hide again

The problem becomes harder to discuss and easier to repeat.

Conviction can point toward change. Shame says the person is beyond change.

ACCOUNTABILITY / GRACE

Tell the truth to people you trust.

Take responsibility without self-destruction.

Make concrete changes.

Return to values after setbacks.

Accountability is not humiliation. Grace is not permission to avoid responsibility.

“...he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” — **Proverbs 28:13 (ESV)**

Why “just stop” usually fails

THE OLD PLAN

Triggers remain unchanged
Access stays easy
Stress is untreated
No one else knows

HEALTHY LIVING

Identify high-risk situations
Add friction and boundaries (no cell phone in
bedroom, limit its use)
Treat the underlying issue
Practice new daily habits (exercise, daily
scripture reading)
Build honest connection with fellow brothers

Step 1 — Recognize the pattern

WHERE?

Where was I?

WHEN?

What time / day?

WHAT?

What happened
just before?

FEELING?

Lonely, angry,
stressed, bored,
rejected?

NEED?

What did I need in
that moment?

Trigger → Thought → Urge → Behavior → Consequence

URGE SURFING

RIDE THE WAVE WITHOUT GIVING IN

Urges are like waves — they rise, peak, and eventually fall. You don't have to fight them. You just have to learn to ride them.

"When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

1 Corinthians 10:13

"YOU CAN'T STOP THE WAVES, BUT YOU CAN LEARN TO SURF."

THE URGE IS A FEELING.
A FEELING IS NOT A COMMAND.



1



NOTICE

Recognize the urge. Name what you're feeling (e.g., stress, boredom, loneliness).

2



BREATHE

Slow down. Take a few slow, deep breaths. This helps calm your nervous system.

3



RIDE

Allow the urge to be there. Watch it rise, peak, and fall like a wave.

4



BE PATIENT

Urges usually peak within 10–20 minutes and then decline.

5



CHOOSE

When the wave passes, choose a healthy next step that aligns with your values.

FREEDOM IS POSSIBLE.

Step 3 — Change the environment

ADD FRICTION

- Phone outside bedroom
- Filters / blocking tools
- Gambling self-exclusion
- Limit access to money
- Avoid high-risk routes / apps
- Do not isolate at vulnerable times

REPLACE THE FUNCTION

Stress → exercise / prayer / scripture reading

Loneliness → call someone

Boredom → structured activity

Anger → cool down / journal / exercise

Nighttime urge → sleep routine

PLAN BEFORE THE URGE

Decide when calm.

Write the plan down.

Tell another person.

Practice it before you need it.

Step 4 — Replace isolation with connection

SECRECY → **HONESTY** → **CONNECTION**

ACCOUNTABILITY

Someone who knows the plan and asks specific questions.

BROTHERHOOD

Men who can tolerate honesty without minimizing or humiliating.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

Therapy, medical care, or specialty treatment when the problem exceeds self-help.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another...” — James 5:16 (ESV)

Faith is essential to healthy living

VALUES

Who am I becoming?

PRAYER

Pause, reflect, seek strength

SCRIPTURE

Meaning, identity, reframing

COMMUNITY

Connection instead of secrecy

ACCOUNTABILITY

Truth with support

GRACE

Return after setbacks

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. — **Romans 12:2 ESV***

When should a man seek help?

WARNING SIGNS

- Repeated failed attempts to stop
- Escalating time, money, or intensity
- Hiding or lying about the behavior
- Relationship, work, legal, or financial harm
- Using primarily to cope with distress
- Depression, trauma, substance use, or other mental-health concerns
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm (seek immediate crisis/emergency help)

WHAT HELP CAN LOOK LIKE

- Evidence-based psychotherapy (e.g., CBT / ACT approaches)
- Gambling-specific treatment and financial safeguards
- Substance-use treatment / medical evaluation for clinical guidance
- Couples or family work when appropriate
- Peer / recovery support / Celebrate Recovery
- Pastoral support integrated with clinical care when desired

A path toward freedom

RECOGNIZE →

UNDERSTAND →

INTERRUPT →

REPLACE →

CONNECT →

RETURN

You are not trying to become a man who *never* struggles.

You are becoming a man who recognizes the struggle earlier, responds differently,
and refuses to face it alone.

Truth • Skills • Support • Accountability • Hope