

## **Alcoholism and Drug Addiction**

The devastating consequences of drunkenness and drug addiction have impacted most all of us either by personal experience or through a family member or friend. The Bible calls drunkenness “dissipation” which means a squandering of energy, resources, time, or money. It is also called a “mockery” that ruins our relationship with God and our loved ones.

Proverbs 23:29-35 Drunkenness can happen to anyone who drinks too much, while alcoholism is another matter. The literature of Alcoholics’ Anonymous communicates that a person who is an alcoholic is distinguished from others by two realities – the “phenomenon of craving” and “mental obsession.” The word “phenomenon” means we can observe something that happens, but the cause or explanation is in question. The alcoholic experiences the compulsive desire for more after the first drink when others do not. We acknowledge this to be true but do not understand why. The cravings for the alcoholic are never satisfied, no matter how many drinks follow, and they are consistent with every drinking episode. With the first drink, something is triggered in the mind that sets off this powerful desire that is never quenched. The nonalcoholic, even heavy drinkers, do not experience this same intensity of craving.

Just as baffling, if not more so, is the mental obsession that leads the alcoholic to take the first drink after having repeatedly experienced the devastating consequences of previous drinking episodes. Since the first drink always leads to drunkenness and drunkenness always leads to painful consequences, commonsense dictates avoiding the first drink. However, for the alcoholic such commonsense is nonexistent, hence the “mental obsession.” Intellect, morals, faith, love for self and others hold little sway when the impulse to drink resurfaces.

The devastating consequences of drunkenness emblazoned throughout the Scriptures plus numerous warnings of avoidance are striking. Examples are Noah and Ham, Lot and his two daughters, Nadab and Abihu

Isaiah 28:7-8 The priest and the prophet

### **Suggestions for Recovery:**

Surrender - Psalm 139:23-24 The first step and perhaps the hardest step of getting on top of excessive drinking or drug addiction is to be honest with self and admit what you are and that it is impossible for you to help yourself. Reading the Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous book and attending AA or NA meetings may help to understand where you are at.

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction (alcohol), that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Bible – Study the Sermon on the Mount, the book of James, and 1 Corinthians 13. Bill Wilson developed the basic understanding of AA in Oxford groups that focused on these Scriptures.

Pray - ask for help and forgiveness. 1 John 1:8-9

Learn to fight temptations – Mathew 6:9-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Mathew 4:1ff Jesus provides the standard.

Let someone help you – Part of the twelve step program is sponsorship. 1 Peter 5:5-9

Daily work – Attend fellowships, church, and AA or NA meetings. Work the Bible and related recovery material. Matthew 6:34

Alcoholics or drug addicts cannot deliver themselves. Neither the medical field nor psychological field can deliver the afflicted, only God through our Lord Jesus Christ can deliver us.

Without God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, without a desire for the Scriptures and a passion for a love relationship with God and His Son, there is no true healing from any addictive behavior.

We are going to look at addictive behaviors. What we generally leap to when we think of addictions is alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, gambling, pornography, etc. What I am looking at is a broader view of addictions and considering them to be sin patterns in our lives. Do you ever get tired of asking God over and over to forgive you for the same sins? These are the sin patterns that are a part of our old man nature that we struggle against sometimes daily.

To be able to help ourselves and to help others, we need to persevere in applying the Scriptures more deeply in our own lives and in our role as a helper. The main part of being a good listener is to show others how the Gospel message (which is growing in Christ also) meets our deepest needs.

We never cure sin, we contain it. We can be delivered of evil spirits, from lust (which consists of thinking and passion for something sinful), and healed of the physical damages of the sin, but the biggest consequence is we will always have to be on the alert, being very vigilant to keep ourselves away from any temptations. We can never let down our guard. If you talk with someone who has successfully been clean and sober for 20 or more years, that person continues to go to meetings; chooses carefully where to hang out; selects friends with wisdom; is diligent to watch for stressors and negative thought patterns; and diligently works on reading Scripture, prayer, and service to God's people. Whether with alcohol or anxiety, drugs or depression, we can be more than a conqueror. Christ took care of the problem of sin; now we have to be obedient and not sin anymore. Sounds simple....

Until Christ returns, we will have struggles, obstacles, and sometimes torment.

For every alcoholic, drug addict, or other addicted person, there is going to be one or more people who have co-dependent and enabling behaviors.

Family Systems – difficult to change this because it is the familiar. Even though it is choking the life out of the family, the dysfunction seems better to them than the unknown.

Nancy Regan 1980's and 1990's promoted the "War on Drugs." "Just say no to drugs" was the slogan. The DARE program was used in schools to educate children on the danger of drugs, with mixed reviews of the outcomes of the programs. The government allocated a huge amount of money into drug and alcohol research. They looked at the family system and found that in an addictive system, there are dysfunctional behaviors including co-dependency.

A family adapts to the chemically dependent person by taking on roles that help reduce stress, deal with the uncertainty, and allow the family to function within the dysfunction and fear created by the alcoholic/addict.

We learn these roles as children in a family who struggles with addictive behaviors, any type of abuse, neglect, or modeling by parents/caregivers. These roles appear to help reduce stress and deal with uncertainty. Even though these roles may seem to reduce stress at the time, they do not reduce anxiety. These behaviors allow the alcoholic/addict to continue in his or her behavior. In order to survive, the family develops ways of managing the chaos or the elephants in the room which represent pain and suffering.

Following are roles that are prominently seen. Some family members may take on different roles at different times or switch between different roles at certain times. It is important to know what characteristics promote unhealthy relationships so that we can help those in denial or wanting to change to have the Word and skills to be able to change.

**The Enabler** – The enabler is a family member who steps in and protects the alcoholic/addict from the consequences of his or her behavior. There are different motivations to do this behavior. One may be to protect the alcoholic/addict. Others may be to prevent embarrassment of self and/or family, avoid conflict, minimize anxiety, or to maintain some control over a difficult situation. The enabler tries to clean up messes caused and make excuses for the alcoholic/addict which minimizes the consequences of addiction. The enabler robs the other person of being independent and mature.

**The Hero** – This family member attempts, by performing well and being next to perfect, to draw attention away from the alcoholic/addict. The hero learns performance-based behavior which can assist in minimizing pain and disappointment.

**The Scapegoat** – This particular family member usually creates other problems in order to deflect attention away from the real issue, the alcoholic/addict. Generally this is done by behaving badly, failing in school, and his/her own substance abuse, sexual acting out, etc. This role generally works well at becoming the focus of the family's attention and overlooking the real problem.

**The Lost Child** – The lost child tends to ignore the problem completely by isolating, spending time alone with quiet activities. The lost child is many times thought of as the "good" child. The lost child does not take attention away from the problem in the family; the child tends to avoid personal stress.

**The Mascot** – The mascot attempts to use humor as a means to escape from the pain of the problems caused by addiction. Cracking jokes, being the class clown, making fun of serious situations are a few ways the mascot tries to diffuse the situations.

While an addict is forsaking all else to take in a substance, he/she will die (or hit "bottom") unless someone else is taking care of the things needed to actually survive, such as food, shelter, finances, and relationships. Enter...the co-dependent. For the alcoholic/addict the solution to his/her problems is the drug of choice. For the co-dependent, some of the solutions to his/her problems are overstepping boundaries under the guise of "helping;" coming to the

rescue of someone; doing God's work; "helping" the family stay together. The unhappy truth about the co-dependent behavior is that as benevolent as it can look, it serves the giver more than the receiver. The co-dependent's "addiction" is the dependence that another has on him/her and the feeling of being loved without having to risk the disclosure of their own needs and doing what is best for him/her. It is a way of coping with true feelings by avoiding them and managing/controlling the external world.

A safe place for addicts is the sin pattern. The neediness and approval of others is the safe place for co-dependents.

One who has addictions needs to be treated by professionals, AA, NA, GA, SA, etc. Most of what you can do as a helper is to work with a person in the family who needs support. Looking out for the "role" that the person takes in the family is important to assist the person to not be in denial of the role and to go to the Word for support and assistance. Co-Dependents "look good." They are busy keeping a lot of plates spinning and put on a good front in the face of one disaster and disappointment after another. Helping people to understand godly boundaries and what burdens we can bear and what ones we are not equipped to bear from the Scriptures is very important. Co-dependency is as much of a sin as other addictions. Denial is a very big hurdle to get over.

How can we help people who battle with repeated patterns of addiction?

- Acknowledge your sin. No denial and be specific.
- Pray daily for forgiveness of sins. Important to forgive ourselves and others. Lord's Prayer.
- Have genuine godly sadness and grieving for our sin patterns. Godly sorrow brings us to repentance. 2 Cor. 7 gives us a great list for helping people in a systematic way to deal with sin patterns.

2 Cor. 7:11 ESV For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

- Pay attention to what you are thinking and doing. Guarding your mind. Be really thoughtful of your thoughts.
- Take responsibility for the sin patterns that you do. Don't make excuses or blame shift for your sins. Family of origin issues need to be healed. Suggest counseling for those who have deep seated and unresolved issues that are triggering sin today.
- Grieve your sinful thoughts and behavior in a godly way.
- If it is appropriate, make restitution for behaviors.
- We first of all have to acknowledge that we need God and believe on Jesus and the Messiah, God's Son.

- We need to admit, without Him, we live in darkness and the only way to the light is through Jesus the Messiah.

A person with good boundaries is not a co-dependent. One who has learned to take ownership of his own personal space and steward it as God would have him to do is one who understands boundaries. Boundaries help us express what is me and what is not me. Coffee table... What of this is mine that I need to change and what is someone else's part? Do we know how to set limits and still be a loving person? Do I feel like I have to do what the other person wants even though it is detrimental to me? Do I feel like I can actually tell someone or others that I have a need and expect it to be heard and understood? Am I selfish when I say I need something or can't help someone?

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Then out of love for God and with the help of the holy spirit, we learn to suppress our own lusts and passions, and instead have the mind of Christ by thinking his thoughts and doing his works.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Help a person who lives with or close to an alcoholic/addict to understand that the addict is just that and will struggle with addictions from time to time. Relapses do happen. We cannot get all wrapped around the axel because of it. This up and down behavior is particularly hard to handle for the family and friends. We get all excited that things are going good, and then, BOOM, the bottom drops out.

**These are some ways to systematically help ourselves and to be a good listener and helper for others:**

### **Self-reflection**

Keep every thought obedient to Christ.

Line everything up that you think with the Word line by line. Write down your thoughts for the last minute. Were they godly thoughts according to Scripture? Good thought – great. Evil thought (one not the Word) - send it packing.

### **Be willing to change – do the hard work**

When we are in a family/friend system that is dysfunctional, those people will have a hard time with your changes and may not recognize that you have changed. Recognize that they try to keep you in the old ways or will just leave you. Stay faithful to your changes no matter what.

**Read Scripture and ask God for wisdom about yourself.** A lot of times we are so used to our own thoughts that we think they are just fine when in fact, they are opposite or skewed from what Scripture says.

**Be aware of symptoms of abuse, depression, grief, and other signs of woundedness** in those you meet. Signs of unhealthy behaviors are being self-protective, pleasing others at all costs, controlling, and hiding our true selves.

**Learn to ask probing but appropriate questions.** If people open up, use that opportunity to teach about the patterns of behavior and emotional damage that comes from being a victim of abuse or abandonment. Teach understanding of the Word in that area. Give people skills to use to help implement the truth of the Word in their lives.

**De-mystify the person's perceptions.** "I am alone, and probably crazy." One of the most important things they can learn is that their feelings and behaviors are reasonable as a response to abuse or abandonment. Their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are normal for someone who has endured pain. Good listening will help them to talk openly about what happened. Don't push this, and don't fear this. Give permission to be honest. Listen carefully, and don't give simplistic answers. Your presence and love mean far more than a theological cliché. Always end with some hope, even if it is just a prayer of "God, please help me."

**Look for opportunities to communicate the message of redemption.** People have come because they recognize their need. At first, they may not have framed their need as a spiritual one, but as you've talked with them, they may realize that our needs stem from a lack of understanding of Scripture and application of it. They may realize that their hurts are a reflection of their need for Christ's forgiveness. With sensitivity and loving care, share the message of the Gospel and assure them of God's great love for them.

**Help people practice spiritual disciplines.** God's part is to change lives. Our part is to do things that will fill our minds with good and godly thoughts so the holy spirit has something to work with. Spiritual disciplines are time-tested practices to fill our minds with truth and focus our hearts on Christ. In some cases, hurting people are already involved in reflection, confession, prayer, journaling, Bible study, connecting with other believers, worship service, and giving. They simply need to go to a deeper level in grasping and applying insights from God's Word. But many of the hurting people we encounter have never developed these habits of the faith, and they need you to teach and model them. As these behaviors become habits, people will learn to gain more from God on their own.

**Hurting people need to see and feel our love, and sometimes they need to be encouraged to take steps of faith to carve out a new way to live.**

D.H.Lawrence - "The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything. Because a new experience displaces so many old experiences."

Don't focus on pain all the time. Dealing with wounds can be all-consuming – for the victim and the helper. Carve out time to do fun things together. Help them laugh, spend time with others, and find joy in life. Focus on honesty, joy, humility, thankfulness, purpose in life, shared meaning with others, peace, patience, etc.

Without God and Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit, without a desire for the Scriptures and a passion for a love relationship with God and His Son, there is no true healing from any addictive behavior.



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