

Addiction—A Bird’s Eye View

We commonly think of addiction as applying to alcohol and drugs but we easily become dependent on, and addicted to, good things in God’s creation such as food and sex. We may also become dependent on work, shopping, gambling, and exercise. We use these things to give pleasure and to take away the pains of life in a fallen world. The Bible does not use the language of “addiction” but it describes the same phenomenon in several different ways and we discover that we all live on the edge of addiction. There are common patterns and themes in all addictions that give clues to how we may break free and live a more balanced, healthy, and holy life.

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Part 1: Addiction

I. Definition.

An overpowering, repetitive, excessive need exists for some substance, object, feeling, act, environment or personal interaction, and this results in compulsive behavior.

- A. Habit, compulsion, abuse, dependence, addiction
- B. Craving... compulsion... continued loss of control
- C. Addiction by degrees...

II. Substance Abuse and Addiction

- A. Stimulants (“uppers”)
 - 1. Caffeine
 - 2. Nicotine
 - 3. Amphetamine
 - 4. Methamphetamine
 - 5. Cocaine
 - 6. Glue
 - 7. Ecstasy
 - 8. Neuro-enhancement
- B. Depressants (“downers”)

1. Alcohol 23% binge drinking, 7% heavy drinking
2. Progression
 - a. Casual/social... regular consumption of excessive amounts...
reliance on alcohol for relaxation and anxiety relief. Sometimes
Binge drinking
 - b. Growing anticipation – *of welcome effect of chemical*
 - c. Growing rigidity – *around times and occasions of drinking*
 - d. Growing physical tolerance - *need more ingenuity to get the amount*
3. Addiction – 3 or more of following:
 - a. **Tolerance**
 - b. **Withdrawal**
 - c. Taking **more and for longer** than intended
 - d. Wanting or trying unsuccessfully to **cut down**
 - e. Spending a great deal of **time** under the influence
 - f. Giving up other **interests/activities** for drug/habit
 - g. Using despite **harmful** physical or psych effects

C. Sedative-Hypnotics

D. Opioids/Narcotics

E. Hallucinogens

1. Marijuana

- a. 10% Adults who use become dependent
- b. Long term use: Slows processing of complex information
- c. Deterioration of memory and learning

F. Common Path

G. Process/Lifestyle Addictions

1. Shopping...
2. Food
3. Sex/Pornography

4. Gambling, Work, Computer games, Video games
5. Movies, Sport, TV, Adrenaline...

H. Positive addictions?

III. Central Themes.

- A. Escape from painful feelings, thoughts and reality.
- B. Avoid uncomfortable emotions
- C. Illusion of control
- D. Get pleasure – avoid pain

IV. Living on the Edge

V. Addiction and Scripture

- A. Captured by the beast (Gen 4:7, 1 Cor 6:12)
- B. Disordered desires – Prisoner to sin

So I find this law at work. When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner to the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am? Who will rescue me from this body of death? Romans 7: 21-25

- C. Adultery (Jer 2 and Hos 2)
- D. Folly (Proverbs 7 and 9)
- E. Idolatry – a disorder of worship (Ps 40:4, Jer 13:25, 16:19, 2 Kings 17:41, Ezek 14:7, 1 Peter 4:3, Col 3:5, 1 John 5:21)

VI. Towards health and healing

- A. What does the addiction do? “Find meaning to replace addiction”
- B. Explore underlying themes (Heart issues and vulnerability)
- C. How to deal with underlying problem more effectively?
- D. How to break compulsive cycles?
- E. Behavior and thought life battles
- F. Retraining the brain
- G. Honesty in relationships
- H. Learning healthy emotions

VII. Growing Freedom

- A. *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... Everyone who sins is a slave to sin... If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*
John 8:31-36

- B. *He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1*
- C. *This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise; we are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road.*
Martin Luther

Suggested Readings:

Alcohol Use and Abuse. A Harvard Medical School Special Health Report. Order from www.health.harvard.edu

Overcoming Addiction. A Harvard Medical School Special Health Report. Order from www.health.harvard.edu

Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel, Ed Welch, 2001

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