

Emotions, Emotional Distress and Addictions

Sunday School Class
Trinity Baptist Church

Part Three: Dealing with Addictions and Compulsions (G452)

Introduction

- God created us with the capacity for experiencing pleasure (Ps. 139)
 - A variety of human experiences create pleasure (food, restful sleep, beautiful music, love and affection, etc.)
 - The experience of pleasure is associated with the chemical activation of a “pleasure center” in the brain
 - The ability to experience pleasure is a gift from God—and when enjoyed properly, according to His instructions and precepts, our deepest pleasures point us to our creator
 - Look at how various pleasures are referenced in the Bible as having a spiritual application:
 - Song of songs—sexual/romantic love a picture of Christ’s love for His church
 - Taste and see the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8)
 - And of course, the greatest pleasure is God himself (Ps. 16:11—at your right hand are pleasure forevermore...) (note hymn we sang)
- Like all of God’s gifts, the gifts of pleasure have the potential of being twisted and distorted—chiefly when pleasure becomes an end in itself—when we pursue pleasure rather than the Giver of pleasure (Rom. 1: 18-32)—this is idolatry and sin
- While it is true that every sinner is described in scripture as a “slave to sin” (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:16), it is also true that certain individuals become enslaved to patterns of pleasure-seeking behaviour in a much more blatantly-obvious and much more immediately-destructive manner
- We refer to these enslavements as **addictions** and **compulsions**
- Addictions:
 - dependence on a substance or behaviour based on tolerance (law of diminishing returns)
 - withdrawal symptoms (or engaging in addictive behaviour to avoid withdrawal symptoms)
 - inability to control the behaviour
 - the behaviour is having a negative effect on one’s social/occupational life, or physical/psychological health
- Compulsions:
 - Intrusive, repetitive and unwanted urges to perform an act that is counter to a person’s usual conduct
- Goals: to gain understanding of addictions and compulsions so as to:
 - enable us to respond helpfully and compassionately to those caught in their snare
 - enable those of us who may be wrestling with addictions/compulsions of one sort or another ourselves, to win this battle for our good and the glory of God

Scope of the problem

- Addictions rank among top health and social issues in N. Am.
- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Survey in 2002:
 - 54 million Americans binge drink
 - 15.9 million are heavy drinkers
 - 19.5 million Americans between 12 and older abuse illicit drugs
 - 14.6 million use marijuana
 - 20 million cocaine users—567,000 use crack cocaine
 - 166,000 heroin addicts
 - 11.6% of young people 12-17 use illicit drugs
 - 20% of young adults 18-25 use illicit drugs
 - in 2002, over 10 million Americans 12 or older used Ecstasy at least once
 - alcohol and drug use contributes to the death of 120,000 Americans annually
 - drugs and alcohol cost Americans more than \$294 billion annually in preventable expenses and lost productivity
 - 71.5 million Americans older than 12 use tobacco (a gateway drug)
 - each day, 3,000 American young people begin smoking—one third to one half will become regular smokers
- Substances that can become addictive:
 - Alcohol
 - Tobacco
 - Marijuana
 - Cocaine, Crack
 - Heroin, Morphine
 - Inhalants (airplane glue, propane, etc.)
 - Methamphetamine
 - Prescription drugs
 - Steroids
 - Caffeine
- Other forms of addiction:
 - Problem gambling
 - Compulsive buying
 - Compulsive overeating
 - Excessive exercising
 - Cutting/self-mutilation
 - Sexual addictions (pornography, telephone sex, etc.)
 - Internet surfing

Is addiction an illness?

- Many Christians balk at the notion that addictions may be thought of as an illness—quite rightly concerned that this kind of thinking absolves addicts of any personal responsibility for their behaviour, promotes a kind of passive, “my brain made me do it” kind of attitude, and as such, discourages repentance, and genuine efforts to change—and perhaps even justifies ongoing addictive patterns
- As is often the case, however, it is neither helpful nor accurate to try to reduce or simplify addictions to a “just” (i.e., just sin, just an illness, etc.).
- There is clear scientific evidence of strong genetic and neurobiological influences in the development and maintenance of addictions

- Children of alcohol-addicted parents are far more at risk for becoming alcohol-addicted themselves (even factoring out environmental influence)—in other words, alcoholism runs in families
- For some people and some substances, addiction can occur after one exposure
- Addicted brains are different from the brains of the non-addicted
 - In some cases these changes may constitute a vulnerability to addiction
 - E.g., growing up in a dysfunctional home environment, deprived of healthy nurturing, may result in abnormal development of pathways that stimulate the pleasure centre of the brain
 - Irreversible changes occur in the brains of individuals who repeatedly abuse substances—changes in both the structure of the brain and in the biochemical processes
 - E.g., chronic overstimulation of the pleasure centre can lead to cravings when the addictive behaviour stops (analogy to ADHD)
 - E.g., even after long periods of abstinence, addicts can very quickly slip back into loss of control

Spiritual Dimensions

- So, in some ways, addictions can be thought of as an illness—but this must not cause us to lose sight of the moral and spiritual dimensions of the problem
- Spiritual factors in the development and the prevention of addictive behaviour
 - Sin is real—Satan is real—he knows where we are weak and attacks us there (Gen. 4:7—sin lies at the door—and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it)
 - We must resist the devil and he will flee (Jas. 4:7)—sometimes we must flee (cf. Joseph)
 - We must guard our hearts (Prov. 4:23)
 - We must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14)
 - We must abstain from fleshly desires which wage war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11)
- Spiritual impact of addictive behaviour
 - Addictive behaviour disqualifies for certain forms of spiritual service
 - Christian leaders are not to be addicted or “given to much” wine (1 Tim. 3:3; 1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7)
 - Similarly, older women are not to be addicted to wine (Titus 2:3)
 - Loss of intimacy with God, loss of joy in salvation, sense of hypocrisy, estrangement from others, dishonesty, etc. etc.

Steps for dealing with an addiction (acknowledge Ken James and the Christian Answers website--
<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/sexaddictiontips.html>)

- Face the facts—acknowledge the sinfulness and destructiveness of your behaviour—and the harm it is bringing or will inevitably bring to others—admit you are addicted
- If you have never surrendered your life to Christ and trusted in Him alone for salvation, do so immediately—“The Scripture contains no promise of help in overcoming temptation for those who are unsaved” but offers tremendous promises of help for those who are in Christ
- Admit your weakness—your own inability to combat this problem in the power of your own strength—humble yourself (1 Pet. 5: 6-7)
- Pray without ceasing

- Confessing all known sin (Ps. 51)
- Renounce conformity to the world (Rom. 12: 2; 6:13-14)
- Earnestly seek an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ (Eph. 3: 14-19)
- Offer your body as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1-2)
- Worship God
- Thank and praise God for His grace and mercy
- Ask God for help in living a holy life free of addictive behaviour
- Read and memorize scripture
- Establish accountability (to overcome shame and secrecy)
- Guard your heart—what you're thinking about (Eph. 6: 12-20)
- Make no provision for the flesh, avoid temptations (e.g., Internet filters, avoid HRS's), change habits, etc. (Ps. 119:37), get rid of anything that might cause you to stumble
- Access available resources—books, videos, support groups, etc.

Principles for relating to the struggling addict

- Gal. 6:1 – 5 should be our guide for dealing with addicted brothers and sisters
- Don't soft-pedal sin or collude in justifying sin—call a spade a spade
- Show compassion, gentleness and love to your struggling brother or sister
- Seek restoration
- Provide accountability structures
- Watch out for yourself that you aren't tempted—you're not invulnerable
- Maintain boundaries
- Don't try to become an addiction counselor—know when you're out of your depth and refer on

Note: Considering the addicted can be a great blessing—in them (or ourselves) we see very graphically the desperate spiritual condition of all men apart from Christ—but in them (or in ourselves) we also see the power of God's grace to save to the uttermost as we relinquish any trust in self and like Peter walking on the water, look only to Christ to keep from sinking!

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