

# Chapter 1

## Forget the Labels

Many of us who have struggled with addiction have a particularly difficult time when we come to the decision of having to determine whether or not to accept the truth about a situation. In many addiction recovery circles, this defining moment is solidified by the adoption of a label: *“I am an alcoholic.”* or *“I am a cocaine addict.”* Facing and accepting your addiction need not be surrendering to a life of carrying a label that diminishes you or causes you shame or discomfort. Forget the labels. Addiction is simply: *“The repeated use of a substance or behavior despite the consequences.”* Do you or a loved one have a habit that causes discomfort or pain? If you say *“yes,”* then you have an addiction. Don’t get caught in the trap of wrestling with the idea that you only need help if you fit stereotypical labels. Many an addict has postponed the journey to wellness because they didn’t want to be labeled, or they resisted the idea that they fit the description of a typical alcoholic or drug user. Anyone who has been caught in the slavery of addiction knows this to be true. I have clients that come to me and say: *“I just can’t figure this out, I have a wonderful career, I have a wonderful family, I am doing great in all these areas in my life but there is one area in my life I cannot seem to get a handle on, or control--why do I keep doing this behavior over and over again? It makes no sense to me!”* If you have ever struggled with these types of questions, you know the madness addiction can bring.

Perhaps you are on the outside watching the life of a loved one and you see their pathway spiraling down towards utter destruction. You see them losing money, social status, jobs, and relationships. In witnessing all the pain, logically you think: *“Can’t you see what you are doing to yourself? You are killing yourself and the people around you are suffering!”* Why do they continue to repeat this destructive behavior over and over? This is addiction. This is the crazy rollercoaster of a life out of control.

By virtue of the fact that you have picked up this book, you are acknowledging the discomfort inside yourself that tells you there is a problem that needs fixing. Some problems can’t be fixed alone and addiction is one of them. If you were able to get your addiction under control, you would have done it by now - right? If you have a legal problem, what do you do? You go to a lawyer. If you have a physical problem, what do you do? You see a doctor. So, it only makes sense that if you have a problem with chemical dependency, you would seek help from someone who can help you. So, now is the time to seek assistance and get on the journey to wellness. There can be great discomfort in seeking help. At the outset, it doesn’t always feel good, but it is a necessary hill to climb in your

recovery. Compared to a lifetime of pain, reaching out is only temporary discomfort. You will soon find relief in collaborating with compassionate others on your journey to wellness.

Compassion, along with an effective program, is what this book is all about. I will show you how to go about adopting a mind-set that will shift your perspective about your addiction, and will help you stop your habitual behaviors in a very positive way.

Watch out for that voice in your head that may try to tell you that you can handle this all by yourself. That's the part of your thinking that prevents you from stopping over and over again. This is not something you need to handle next week or even next month. This is something you need to address right now. I am asking you to make a commitment to deal with your problem, or chances are, you will continue to use and postpone the life and happiness you seek. Ask yourself, *"If I don't do something now, then when will I?"* If you deal with this now, in a positive and effective way, then you can begin to fashion a whole new life for yourself.

Some may define addiction as a bad habit, a psychological compulsion, an obsession, dependence, or disease. But the Bible has a different word for it. If you look in the Bible, you never see the word "addiction," that's the word we use in our culture today. The word the Bible uses to imply addiction is "slavery"-- *"For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."*<sup>1</sup> The "master" is the substance and the "slave" is the addict. Anyone who has been caught in the slavery of addiction understands this concept. Those of us who have struggled with addiction know the inner pang of truth that says, *"I am a slave."* There are many kinds of slaves: Slaves to alcohol, slaves to pornography, slaves to anger, slaves to sexual addiction, slaves to food, and countless others. The New Horizons Choice Process is applicable and effective for any form of slavery.

From time to time, I get calls from people who want an assessment to see whether or not they are an alcoholic. Some types of formal substance abuse assessments can be very costly and take several hours. I tell them that we can do the assessment right now, right here, on the phone, free of charge! This makes them happy, and so we begin:

Me: *"Okay, are you ready?"*

Caller: *"Yes."*

Me: *"Here is the first question: Do you drink?"*

Caller: *"Yes."*

Me: *"Does your drinking cause you problems?"*

Caller: *"Yes."*

Me: *"Okay, our assessment is over. You are a problem drinker. Let's get started."*

There is often a chuckle on the other end of the line because they get my point. I tell them that I don't care about labels. It doesn't matter to me if you are labeled an alcoholic, a druggie, a pothead, or

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter :19b The New International Version of the Holy Bible

anything else. What matters, is if the behavior or substance is causing you problems or pain. If it is, then you are not getting what you really want and need: peace of mind, happiness, joy, meaningful relationships, and good health. If your addiction is keeping you from any or all of these qualities, then it's time to get some help!

## **Figure it out**

Definition of Addiction – “The repeated use of a substance

or behavior \_\_\_\_\_ the consequences.”

What enslaves you? (name your addiction)