

ADDICTION 101

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
- Philippians 4:13

OVERVIEW—

It is an ancient and contemporary dilemma. It takes many forms in mankind’s pursuit of what is meaningless and destructive. It defies human reasoning. It has been aptly framed as “insanity” defined as “Doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results.”

We are talking about addiction. The object of this destructive pattern include— alcohol, other drugs, pornography, gambling, etc. For the sake of this paper we will focus on alcohol, with application to the others. Our understanding will be tied to a series of concepts all beginning with the letter “R.”

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION—

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious...drunkenness.”
(Galatians 5:19a & 20b)

Reality—Addiction is a real human condition. It is also personalized to each individual. Addiction does not conform to a pre-determined pattern. Though there are common dimensions, each addict is still unique—tied to their personality, life circumstances, and involvement in the pattern. Classic labels (i.e. alcoholic, addict, etc.) are misleading as they presume consistent symptoms for all such people.

Chemical addiction (alcohol & other drugs) is often defined as a “disease.” This implies that it - (1) has well-defined symptoms; (2) is progressive; and, (3) will ultimately end in death unless arrested.

Reward(s)—The main, inner motivation for this behavior is the perceived benefits of continued involvement. The “buzz”...the “high”...the “rush”...the “pay-off”—are common definitions for the experience. Though these outcomes are not guaranteed, the anticipation of the reward is sufficient to repeat the behavior. Returning to old behaviors is normal. The addict becomes myopic, not seeking other options to find the same desired outcome.

These rewards are not reasonable. Indeed, it is when the reward is still pursued regardless of negative consequences that addiction is likely. See more under Relationships below.

Risk(s)—Here are the negative, personal outcomes to this behavior pattern. These risks can be in any area of a person’s life. Over-involvement in any action can lead to risks. Addicts do not learn from these outcomes. Here again we can

apply the “insanity” definition from above. These personal losses in life can be devastating...often affecting the lives of others closest to the addict.

All addiction involves spiritual warfare. Satan wants to destroy all that is good and Godly. He wants to steal the abundant life Christ offers (John 10:10b).

Relationship(s)—Here we find a definition for “addiction” - “When a person’s relationship to the addictive behavior causes damage to love relationships.” The latter are to be the highest priority in our lives. Therefore, jeopardizing such love is significant. To sacrifice a love relationship for the sake of pursuing a pattern that holds no realistic benefit defies human reasoning. The adverse affect on one’s relationship with God is a significant one to consider.

Ripple—Addictive behavior affects others. Addiction causes pain in other people’s lives. Others are put at risk (i.e. drinking and driving). The common rationale used by the addict - “What I do is my business” is short-sighted and careless. Satan seeks to destroy individuals and the collateral damage in relationships.

UNDERSTANDING RECOVERY—

“Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Repentance—This is the crossroad...the foundation for lasting life change. Here we find a humble acceptance of one’s real life condition. Humility is a defining characteristic. Along with this goes Honesty and Hard work—the three, key “H’s” of recovery’s foundation.

Responsibility—Tied to the above characteristic is taking responsibility for one’s past and present actions. What is set aside is defensiveness, including the blaming of others, or life circumstances. Life change is also the responsibility of the addict. No one else can do the work of recovery.

Re-formation—The addict’s whole life needs to be reformed. The cessation of the addictive behavior is only the threshold of the journey. A person’s thinking, attitudes, actions—all need to be changed. This is a slow process but doable. Paul offers these insights that can be applied—

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”
(Romans 8:5)

Yes, in contrast to “death” as the ultimate outcome of the “sinful nature,” the Holy Spirit offers “life and peace” (vs.6). Recovery offers the same spiritual blessings through the in-dwelling Spirit.

Relationships—The healing of existing relationships...and the formation of new, accountable ones are essential. Being involved in a recovery community can be very valuable. One's renewed relationship with God, or a new one--is pivotal. Recovery is not meant to be done alone. Celebrate Recovery (A Bible-centered recovery program) places God at the center of the full process.

There is a need for warning here. Reconnecting to old relationships can be risky, especially if the other person is an active addict. Such a connection can be ripe with temptation that needs to be avoided. Accountability partners should be the same gender.

Replacement—The cessation of the addictive behavior creates a “hole” in the addict's life. This empty space needs to be filled with healthy people, places and past times. The risk of relapse is higher when these alternatives are ignored.

Satan, who promoted the desire for “forbidden fruit” continues to be active in the life of the recovering person. He will instill restlessness, and open doors of temptation. He is a sinister master of triggering old thinking and behaving.

Relapse—This retreat back to old behavior is “normal” in this recovery process (meaning that the majority of addicts experience this regression). This is not to be viewed as failure, but as a learning junction point. Recovery is a long-term process with highs and lows. Getting reconnected to recovery patterns is a key following relapse.

Resiliency—This “bounce in reserve” can make a vital difference when life takes a negative turn, or old thinking returns. An accountability partner can also aid in this buffer from relapse. Having a plan of action for tough times is also advised.

SUMMARY—

Addiction is a complex human condition, as outlined above. The same can be said of recovery. At the core both have a spiritual component. This includes the positioning of God in one's life. He is fully ready to aid the addict in turning one's life in a new direction. The Bible is a reliable counseling manual. Through Christ, “new creations” are made possible (2 Corinthians 5:17a).

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” - Jeremiah 29:11

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