

Understanding The Basics Series



Hooked! The Tragedy of Addiction

Christie Bature Ogbeifun



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Book Two in the Understanding The Basics Series

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Dedication

To all seekers of truth and knowledge.

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Introduction

Definitions

The dictionary defines addiction as:

The state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.

The scriptural definition for addiction is powerfully, graphically captured in the book of Romans chapter seven from verse fourteen to twenty three. (Rom 7: 14- 23 MSG)

"I can anticipate the response that is coming: "I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?" Yes. I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary.

But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge."

I personally believe that Paul must have been struggling with something, to have so succinctly captured the angst, inner conflict, and the hopelessness of the addict.

My definition of addiction is, a person forming a habit, and the habit turning around to form the person. A common example to give is of "the village drunk". I come from Nigeria, and we live in communities called villages in the rural areas. If one went into a village and asked for the village drunk, everyone would know who was being referred to. The person has a name, but no one remembers it anymore. He formed a habit, and now, the habit

has formed him. Same as people who are referred to as 'chain- smoker, or 'chimney' 'weed/ Igbo head' or 'crack head'.

Why is Addiction so Powerful?

At any point in time, two things are going on in our brains: electrical and chemical impulses are firing at the same time. The electrical impulses represent our thoughts and the chemical ones represent our emotions. Thought shoot through our heads all the time, and the chemicals follow right after them.

Note that the principles of addictions are all the same, it is the drug of choice that differs. I will use the example of what happens when humans are being sexual, hence revealing the potential for addiction. It can safely be assumed that it is the same for other types of addiction, namely, drugs, gambling, shopping, anger, food, work, etc.

Also know that pleasurable experiences produce positive 'feel good' chemicals, and painful experiences produce negative 'downer' chemicals.

Anything sexual causes a chemical cocktail to be stirred up.

The sexual chemical cocktail

- 1) Adrenaline: anything that creates and sustains fear, anxiety, panic or risky excitement can cause adrenalin to be produced and stimulated, and yes, sex produces adrenaline. It gives a 'high' and causes a person to feel motivated and energized.
- 2) Dopamine: this follows with a rush of pleasurable feeling. It causes the brain to focus, blocking out everything else except the object of affection or obsession. It also increases blood flow to the body (which is very important especially for the men, as blood flow is necessary for erection) A release of dopamine is associated with craving and dependency in addiction.
- 3) The next chemical to follow is oxytocin. This is a cleansing chemical that cleanses away negative 'downer' chemicals in the brain. It binds the brain to the experience, and creates a sense of wellbeing, even in non sexual touching, like when a baby is suckling. Oxytocin is what is responsible for the unusual attachment between a baby and the mother; it is produced during breast feeding also.

- 4) Norepinephrine follows and is an anti-depressant. When it spikes, it triggers ejaculation. It creates vigilant concentration, helping to create memories, and sears them in the brain. This chemical induces euphoria in the brain, excitement in the body and causes the heart to beat faster.
- 5) The endorphins seal up the cycle. They have a calming effect on the brain and the body. They reduce pain, induce pleasure, and slow the heart rate- very similar to Heroin's effects – and free the mind from stress. Endorphins act as natural painkillers for the body.

The front end of the sexual experience has the same effect on the human brain as cocaine, oxytocin has the same effect on the brain as marijuana, and the latter part of the sexual cycle has the same effect as heroin, no wonder it is so easy to get addicted to it; sex is a 'high'.

The problem arises when the law of diminishing returns sets in. In addiction, it is called the escalation process or tolerance. No one starts using a substance with a large amount at once. It usually starts with a half a stick of cigarettes, for instance. Nicotine produces a high, and the brain records the feeling and stores it for later (Norepinephrine). When the person comes back the next time and takes half a cigarette, the brain will say to the person "we have experienced this level of pleasure

before, let's take it to another level" the person then goes ahead and finishes a whole stick. From there, it is a definite downward slide into compulsion.

At the beginning of the process, the person is in control, but as the doses increase, the person gradually loses control because the brain becomes 'hijacked' by the drug of choice. He falls into compulsion, to such an extent that even when he doesn't want to in his conscious mind, his subconscious compels him. The brain seems to scream and scream incessantly for the drug, until the person takes it in again. One of the classic signs of addiction is the agitation and discomfort an addict feels when levels of the drug are depleted in his body. The unease is so painful that he goes and takes it just to feel relief. That is why breaking the habit can be very hard.

Addiction is more than a person just wanting to be high, it may be so at the beginning, but at the end of the journey, the person develops a brain disease called addiction.

Are there Addicts in the Bible?

That is a question I hear a lot. For the bible pundits who want to prove everything from the bible before they believe or accept it for a fact, here are classic addicts found in the bible.

Samson: This is a man who was born as a result of prophecy, who had his assignment cut out for him even before he was born. For many of us who wandered about for a long time before we finally arrived at our purpose, we would be offended at Samson for wasting such a golden opportunity of knowing what his assignment was, and how to conduct himself in it, without the stress of the trial and errors we had to fight through. Samson had his work cut out for him, but decided that he wanted something else. He broke every boundary that was supposed to govern his life, and went after women outside of God's will. His life was cut short, and the plan of God for Israel was truncated.

King David:

This is a man favoured and chosen by God, a man of whom God had a testimony: "man after my own heart". This is a man God chose over and above all his older brothers and ordained him king. This was a man who followed the leadings of God through his youth until he finally ascended the throne as king of Israel. Curiously, for one who was a known warrior, he stayed back at home in the season of war, and that was when everything went haywire in his life and that of his family. He committed adultery with his friend's wife and killed him to boot. As we look at the factors that predispose people to addiction, we will see what tripped David up.

King Solomon

Many men will readily agree that having one wife is enough stress, so one can only stare at Solomon with an open mouth to hear that he had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines! That is a classic exhibition of addiction- it never has enough.

Portiphar's wife

This woman's addiction was such that she came at Joseph daily! And this is the truth and reality about addiction. It never lets up and brings compulsion to the addict. Imagine such a highly placed woman obsessed with having sex with a slave, completely

ignoring her marriage covenant to her husband! Addiction makes a person throw caution to the winds.

Gomer

Hosea was God's prophet whom God used as a figure or type of Himself. Gomer was his wife who represented Israel in the saga. As much as God loved Israel, she played the harlot and went after other gods. Hosea had to go looking for his wife in spite of her betrayal, over and over again. She was hooked on sex.

The Prodigal son

This son wanted what the Father had, but not who the Father was. He left with his inheritance, travelled to a far country and squandered it all on riotous living. That is something else about the addict: he squanders resources and decimates relationships all over the place. This is classic for addicts: decimate relationships, and squander money fast.

There are a few others in the Bible, but let these ones suffice

Types of Addiction

There are basically two categories: substance abuse, and behavioural.

As the name suggests, substance abuse involves using substances in ways that constitute abuse. It could be drugs (prescribed, not prescribed, hard drugs, over the counter medications), drinks, food, etc.

Behavioural addiction is being hooked on behaviours like gambling, shopping, anger, work, etc. One of the ones spiralling out of control in our society is sexual addiction, with all kinds of ramifications- gay sex, heterosexual indiscretions, pornography, masturbation, voyeurism, necrophilia, exhibitionism, sado-masochism, etc.

On the whole, we can take any legitimate human endeavour, push it to an extreme, and it becomes an addiction. While food is a legitimate need, we can take our relationship with food to such an extreme that it becomes a problem. We develop

conditions like anorexia, bulimia, and over eating. Shopping is necessary for self care, but we can get so hooked on shopping that we end up in huge debts, because we are spending more than we earn. Sex is a pleasurable human experience within the bounds it was created to operate in, but people can become bent out of shape pursuing sexual gratification in harmful and twisted ways. The enemy can take perfectly legitimate desires we have and try to get us to fulfil them in illegitimate ways.

Please know this: every addiction is a cover for fear or pain. So, most addicts are really afraid of something, or in pain from something. Not knowing how to properly address the fear or pain is what leads them into addiction. Fear and pain are wounds to the soul. When a body is in pain, it seeks medication: for a headache, it may seek paracetamol; for stomach ache, it might seek Gestid, for a sprain, Ben-Gay. In the same vein, when a soul is in pain, it seeks medication. Unfortunately, the wrong kinds of medication are in surplus supply, and so readily available, people get into all kinds of negative addictions in a bid to cope with the fear or pain.

To be sure, there are positive and negative addictions. Reading, keeping fit, dancing, working hard, doing things the right way, can all be good addictions, the danger is that each of these good

things can be pushed to such an extreme that they become negative addictions. The key is balance.

There is addiction to hard drugs, prescription drugs, non-prescription drugs, (over the counter drugs) food, sex, work, anger, sports, etc. again, any behaviour can become an addiction.

Types of Addicts

Much as there are types of addictions, there are also different kinds of addicts. They may be addicted to the same substance or behaviour, but the root of their addiction can differ, and it is critical when helping, to know the kind of addict you are dealing with.

The first kind is the biological addict. This person picked up a stick of cigarette, and kept on smoking and upping his dosage till he became addicted by the force of sheer repetition.

The second type is the spiritual addict, who is looking for God in all the wrong places (the drug or behaviour). Once this person encounters God, his or her need for the addiction dies a natural death. They form a very small percentage of all addicts. These are the ones that in telling their story of freedom will say things like: once I met God, I stopped drinking, or, I stopped womanizing, etc.

The third kind is the psychological based addict. This is a person with a history of past abuse,

abandonment or neglect.

The fourth type is the trauma based addict. This person has experienced some form of trauma in his or her life, as a child or an adolescent, for which they need coping mechanisms. The trauma becomes the major repetitive behaviour in their addiction.

The fifth one is the mood disorder addict. People who struggle with this have chemical imbalances in adolescence or young adulthood. They use the addiction to medicate the chemical imbalance: in doing this regularly, they inadvertently create an addiction.

For the different types, treatment approach will be different.

To find out if you or someone you know has an addiction, take the addiction test online.

Roots of Addiction

So, how do addictions come? What are the root causes?

A lot of people view addicts as weak people who consistently make wrong or poor choices to abuse substances. This is one of the tragedies of addiction. Sure, there are those who just out of curiosity and sheer repetition become addicts, but they form about one fifth or sixth of all addicts. Most others are just trying to cope with curveballs life has thrown at them. Without education or awareness, many do not know to find legitimate and non- harmful ways to cope, and so turn to mood- altering, personality-altering panaceas for their suffering. The first step towards helping is to lose the view of addicts that is presently held: that they simply want to be addicts, and that it is a deliberate choice.

The first doorway is, in my opinion, **Ingratitude**. In the book of Romans chapter one verse twenty one (Rom 1: 21), the Bible says that they knew God,

but did not acknowledge Him as God, neither were thankful. Things go downhill from there. God gave them up. Reading all the way down to the end of the chapter, they fell into addictive behaviours as a result. It is an ungrateful heart that thumbs its nose at God and says "what I have or been given is not enough, I need more, no matter whose ox is gored" It is an ungrateful spouse that goes out to seek another, rather than be satisfied with whom God has blessed them with. It is an ungrateful heart that ignores God's best gift of Jesus Christ, and squanders His sacrifice in riotous living. All of these behaviours ultimately lead to addictions.

The second doorway is the **addictive society** we live in. Society is run by systems that are designed to exclude God, and every attempt is made to live outside the boundaries of decency in the name of modernization. Society attempts to shape the thinking and push the envelope as far as possible or even beyond repair. The impressionable, the young, the uninformed, all get sucked into the hedonism that comes with lack of boundaries, and voila! We have a total disregard for what is decent and right. Truth is bent out of shape, and lies hold sway. When I was a child, adverts for toothpaste actually showed human teeth: Now? A woman's breasts are splashed in one's face. A power bike advert does not show me a brawny man holding the bulky machine; instead, an almost naked woman wearing bum shorts, bending over,

assaults the senses. A woman crying over her husband's adultery is viewed with amusement. "Is that why you are crying? Is that new? Get over it, men will be men" are words she would most likely hear, than understanding or empathy. Man has been redefined to be one who will go after anything in skirts, without fidelity, and without loyalty. Also when I was a child, women made women's clothes, and they covered her up with chic and decency. Today, the highest paid designers for women's clothes are men, who strip them more and more on the runways of fashion shows with each passing year, leaving little to the imagination. Alcohol and drugs are so glamorized by the rich and mighty, without the corresponding education on the effects behind closed doors, away from the limelight. The adverts for alcohol practically drag one in, and yet, alcoholics are being churned out by their numbers, completely at the mercy of alcohol. Drugs are marketed and advertised as the next best thing to God, claims and promises of helping with clarity and focus trail the brokenness that they leave in their wake.

Society is addicted to the racy and daring, and this contributes to the addictions that are holding sway today.

The third doorway is **Personal Trauma**. Trauma is any experience that is so painful that a person needs to find a coping mechanism for. All

addictions are coping mechanisms for life's traumas and hard knocks. As mentioned earlier, Trauma is woundedness in the soul, for which medication is sought. Enter the drug of choice (hard drugs, sex, food, shopping, gambling, anger, work, etc), offering escape and numbing for the pain. I have stories and stories of this particular doorway, which underscore its potency in creating addicts out of victims of painful circumstances.

The final doorway may well be the most potent, and the most ubiquitous: **Family Dysfunction**. A cursory look will reveal the path strewn with this phenomenon in alarming numbers. Everywhere one turns, the burned out embers of family breakdown stare one in the face.

Family is defined as:

A basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not.

And Dysfunction is defined among others by the dictionary as:

1. Any malfunctioning part or element
2. A consequence of a social practice or behaviour pattern that undermines the stability of a social system.

The blessing or curse that a family can inflict is monumental. Two words jump out here: Malfunction and consequence. The malfunctioning of the family is a social practice whose consequence is to undermine. Undermine the family as a unit, and undermine the individuals therein.

The Bible has several examples of this phenomenon playing out in different families. It is so strong that references are made to it in Isaiah and Ezekiel among others. Ezekiel 18: 2 speaks of the fathers eating sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge, and Isaiah 51: 1 speaks of looking to a person's roots while they are pursuing after right living.

Looking at some examples in the Bible, two readily jump to mind: The family of Abraham and the family of David.

Abraham had 2 sons, and one was sent away as a result of Sarah, his wife's jealousy. In the second generation, Jacob, Isaac's son was sent away for fear of what his brother had threatened to do to him once Jacob was dead, and in the third generation, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. The circumstances were different, but the same thing kept happening- one son lost in successive generations.

In the case of King David, none of His sons was there when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, but the bible speaks about the sons of David in 1Chronicles, and mentions six of the older ones by name. 50 percent of them died from sexual sin. Adonijah, Amnon, Absalom. Solomon, born by Bathsheba outdid all the others in sexual debauchery. A careful study will reveal that sexual impropriety was in the lineage from the times of Judah (ten generations from David) who forgot he had been named king, and carelessly stepped out and slept with his daughter in-law, who was dressed as a harlot.

Other examples will be the cunning in Laban's family showing up in Rebecca when she urged Jacob to deceive his father. She preferred a curse coming upon her than to not be cunning or deceptive. Moses, the meekest man on earth missed entering the Promised Land because of anger. Moses is the tenth in line from Levi, one of Jacob's sons who in anger slew the men of Schechem for raping their sister Dinah. Anger stayed in the lineage and tripped up the meekest man on earth- notice the paradox of meekness and anger here.

The truth is that this is probably the most potent doorway through which addictions come.

I hear questions like: "how can a person so high up stoop as low as to have an affair with his house

help?" Or, how can a pastor, bishop, leader, be addicted to drugs or whatever? Looking at the factors that predispose a person to addiction, it is easy to see how anyone can become an addict. Status and means do not immune one to these struggles, especially that most of the seeds of addiction are sown in early childhood.

It is critical to watch children closely, and provide adequate guidance on how to avoid the pitfalls. Please know that the human brain is not fully developed until about age twenty six, and any behaviour that is engaged in becomes ingrained as part of the functioning system or style of the brain, therefore, it is harder to break addictions that started in childhood, than in adulthood. Addiction does not respect age or status or religion. It just takes advantage of any available, vulnerable person.

Effects of Addictions

Drug addiction is often referred to as a preventable disease, meaning that to an extent, people can control the choice to start abusing substances, or slide into behavioural addictions.

It will be futile to attempt to enumerate all the effects of addiction here, but we will address a few of the more common ones. Addictions affect the addict in various ways: health, finances, relationship breakdowns, loss of opportunities, etc.

Health wise, the biggest tragedy is the loss of self. Drugs and other addictions can alter a person so bad, that he or she is unrecognizable by those who knew the person previously. This is because every addiction physically alters the structure of the brain, eating up brain matter like acid eats up flesh. In the truest sense, this is where 'brain damage' is real and literal. Also, substance abuse leads to all kinds of medical conditions. For example, tobacco addiction can cause the 'smoker's hack' a cough that is persistent and raspy, lead to lung cancer, and

also increases the chances of contracting tuberculosis. Alcohol addiction can lead to cirrhosis of the liver which can also lead to congestive heart failure. For injectors of substances, there is the increased risk for infection at the sites of the needle pricks, which can lead to cellulitis- a condition that develops because the veins which are constantly pricked collapse and interrupt blood flow to that part of the body. Swelling then occurs that lead to open sores that may not heal, ever. Food addiction leads to anorexia, bulimia, or obesity. Users of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin risk mental breakdowns, aside from loss of appetite, and withdrawal pains. It is interesting to note that sexual addiction has the same destructive effect on the brain as cocaine. Other health challenges are weakened immune systems, nausea and abdominal pains, increased strain on the liver that can lead to severe damage, problems with memory and decision making, paranoia, aggressiveness, loss of control and ultimately, death.

Some of the effects remain even after the person has stopped using drugs.

Addictions make a person inherently selfish, because the need for the drug supersedes any other need. An addict will do anything to get his or her 'fix' and relationships suffer because of this. One addict in the family can alter the dynamics of that family very drastically. The family becomes

polarized, with some becoming angry, others ashamed, and still others, becoming enablers.

On the wider social circle, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain relationships at work, church or with long term friends, because the drugs impair judgement and render the person unpredictable and many times, erratic and violent. The longer a person remains an addict, the more their circle of friends and family shrinks, until loneliness becomes their best friend. Isolated, suicide becomes an option, and some overdose and die.

Addiction is expensive, no doubt about that. The speed with which an addict will go through money is mind blowing. I have known addicts who smoked heroin to the value of a car in one day! Nothing matters but the high. Only after they have come off the high does the magnitude of their folly dawn, yet, once the urge comes, they look for the next asset to dispose of. Gradually, they trade everything of value to purchase the drug of choice; many times stealing from friends and family to buy whatever they are addicted to. Their ingenuity at extracting money from people is legendary, and they are so believable, it is amazing.

Addictions cost people a lot of opportunities: Jobs, contracts, relationships, ministry positions, integrity, connections, etc. Just take the time to listen to testimonies at group therapy meetings of addicts and there will be no end to lamentations of

opportunities lost.

One of the most heartbreaking sights to behold is of parents grieving the 'loss' of their child to addiction. Their eyes portray the hopelessness they feel, the death of all the dreams they had for the child, and the fear that the child is lost forever. Most parents are usually taken by surprise to discover that their child has been using drugs for a long time. It is usually a crisis at school- maybe the child is suspended or expelled that alerts them to that fact.

Many parents begin to doubt their parenting skills when their child becomes an addict. This is my counsel. If you taught the child right from wrong, if you guided appropriately, if you did the best you could in raising the child, then you are not responsible for the choices the child has made. Also, if you have other children, be encouraged that those others are not also addicts. That should tell you that you are doing a good job. Barring any trauma or crisis that the addicted child may have suffered at some point, do not as a parent, allow guilt to cripple you about any child that chooses to cope with life in destructive ways.

Telltale Signs

What are the signs to look out for, in proving that addiction is present?

There are a few. In his book 'Get a grip', Dr Douglas Weiss enumerates some.

Broken promises: this is where a person has made promises to God, spouse, family, or even his dog, not to engage in a particular behaviour, but finds it impossible to keep the promise.

Entitlement: when a person feels entitled to a particular behaviour, there is probably an addiction there. This is a situation where a person feels that they deserve to enjoy a habit because of certain prevailing conditions, or sacrifices they have made in the past. For example, a man felt entitled to cheat on his wife because, according to him, he had been faithful for 25 years of being married to her, so, what was the big deal in cheating just once? The wrongness of the action was buried under the fact that he believed he was entitled to

cheat once, having been so faithful for a whole 25 years!

Lost opportunities: any behaviour that has cost a person opportunities- job, ministry, business- could be indicative of an addiction present

Failed attempts to change: if attempts have been made to change a particular behaviour without success, addiction could be present.

Negative consequences: certain behaviours always bring with them negative consequences, and if in spite of those the behaviour is still indulged in, then the person could very likely be addicted to the behaviour.

Ineffective prayer: when there is addiction present, it usually feels like the person's prayers are not going anywhere, the prayers don't get off the ground, not to talk of reaching to God.

Your heart knows: No one knows a person like the person. One can lie to others, but not to self. The heart knows the truth about any behaviour indulged in.

Breaking Out of Addiction

The biggest hurdle is denial. Almost never, does an addict admit to being addicted. As long as denial is in place, no one can break out of addiction. So, in breaking free or helping someone break free, the first hurdle to overcome is that of denial. Admission means that a person can no longer claim ignorance, and also that a responsibility comes upon the person immediately to do something about the condition. This is a scary thought for the addict. One of the ways an addict maintains his addiction is to never take responsibility for his actions. And admitting that there is a problem means leaving that place and becoming responsible. Another reason denial is so entrenched is because admitting means the addicts has to relinquish the substance, which has become his coping mechanism for a long time. He is scared of being without it, worrying if he can cope.

Accountability is the next thing to look at in breaking free from addiction. Accountability can

also be called the power-up principle. It is giving someone else the permission to hold you accountable over a certain behaviour. It is setting up a support system over that behaviour, and being committed to work through the issues, even if it comes down to fierce, loving, confrontations. An accountability partner is someone who can respect, love and confront you without fear. Find such a person in your life.

As stated earlier, every addiction is a training of the brain; therefore, to break free, the brain must be retrained. There is a concept called Pavlov's Law of Classical Conditioning. Pavlov was a man who carried out an experiment with a puppy and a bell. Every time he rang the bell, he fed the dog. In a short while, whenever the dog heard the sound of the bell, it started salivating in anticipation of food. After a while, he changed the interaction: this time, whenever he rang the bell, he hit the dog, or inflicted some pain. In a shorter period of time, the dog ran away once it heard the sound of the bell, because it now associated the sound of the bell with pain, not pleasure. Every addiction exists because the brain associates the behaviour with pleasure. To reverse or break the addiction, the brain must be retrained to associate the behaviour with pain. So, I introduce to you, the most potent tool for retraining the brain in the area of addiction: The rubber band! As simple as that! Slip two rubber bands on your non- dominant wrist and wait for

the next time your brain prompts you to engage in the behaviour you want to change. Every time that happens, you must commit to pulling those rubber bands as far back as they would go, and snapping your wrist with them! In recovery, one of the tools you must engage is that of brutal honesty with yourself. If your brain suggests indulging in the behaviour twenty times a day, then you must commit to snapping the rubber bands to your wrist twenty times a day too! This practice has been known to cut down cravings by up to eighty percent within the first ten days of use! This is no joke, try it. It will work for just about any behaviour over which change is desired.

The final thing I will mention here is dealing with the trauma or crisis that is driving the need for the substance or behavioural addiction. Remember, that every addiction is a cover for fear or pain. Every addict needs a safe place to process the issues that are putting him under stress, and finding healthier ways to cope with them. Without this, the other factors mentioned above will only be dealing with the leaves and fruits on a tree, while the root is firmly entrenched in the ground. That tree will not die, it will simply grow the leaves and fruits back.

Addiction and the Christian

There is no one more conflicted than the Christian who is addicted. On one hand, he loves the Lord, but on the other hand, there is this tenacious beast of addiction that refuses to let go. He has learnt to keep the two in separate compartments, never allowing the two to mix. In church, he is the ultimate Christian, while outside, the superlative addict.

This phenomenon is aptly captured by Apostle Paul in Romans 7, as referenced earlier.

"I can anticipate the response that is coming: 'I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?' Yes. I'm full of myself—after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary."

But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge."

The general perception about the Christian addict is that he or she cannot love the Lord, they can't be true Christians, otherwise, they will not be like that. But these verses show clearly that this person loves the Lord and His commands, but also admits that something has gone wrong deep within him. It is in identifying that thing and dealing with it, that deliverance comes to the Christian addict.

The hope that God and scriptures offer in the face of the addict's despair is captured in the next few verses:

"I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."

Romans 7:24-25 (MSG)

Jesus Christ is still the only hope for anyone struggling with addiction.

One of the most painful things to observe as a helper of addicts is the confusion about identity for the Christian who suffers from addiction. On the one hand, he knows that he is a believer, a Christian, but on the other hand, he is doing things that are at variance with who he knows he is. Sometimes, they sit across the table in my office and the confusion inside is clearly written on their faces. "Why am I two persons at the same time?" their eyes ask me, many times, silently pleading that I believe that they are not deliberately flouting the boundaries they know God has placed around their lives and behaviour.

I like to explain it in this manner. Before we become born again, the flesh is fully in control, and every time there is a temptation, the soul sides with the flesh and the person falls into the temptation.

Once we become born again, we begin the process of training the soul to side with the spirit, so that the flesh can be put under. Our struggles persist while we are in this process of arming the spirit to be in charge of body and soul. The more we strengthen the spirit, the weaker the flesh becomes. This underscores the importance of a spiritual work and walk with God in breaking habits that are destructive.

The other thing I encounter is the question from other Christians: can a believer be an addict? Considering the factors that predispose a person to addiction as discussed above, it is very possible for a Christian, a true believer to be addicted. To recap, the factors are: ingratitude, an addictive society, personal trauma, and family dysfunction. These factors have no respect for family name, faith, religion, or status. People go through all kinds of experiences that put them under pressure, and in a bid to cope, fall into these addictions. Granted, there are those who become addicts through mere curiosity, but these are very few in number, compared to the vast majority that become hooked through pain or trauma- remember, every addiction is a cover for fear or pain.

What Can A Family Do?

Minimize wounding of family members, especially children, through neglect, abuse, and abandonment. In addition, the concept of Father-wounding is critical. Fathers are created to protect, provide, defend and direct, and when a father falls short, the effect on the children is dire. Mother-wounding is not much talked about. As we saw earlier, one of the doorways to addiction is family dysfunction, and Father-wounding tops the list here. Fathers are uniquely equipped to provide leadership, provision and protection and when they fail to do so, the children grow up with all kinds of struggles. In her book "Healing the Father-wound", Kathy Rodriguez mentions four kinds of fathers that wound their children enough to tip the scale in favour of addiction later in life.

The first kind of fathers is the Missing-in-action dad. This is a father who interrupts the emotional bonding process with his children by long absences, due to transfers, military postings,

divorce, or even death. Children with such fathers develop certain characteristics like: problems bonding with others, having conflicts with authority and just drifting through life without direction. They are more likely to develop a condition called co-dependency, which is outside the scope of this book.

The second kind is the boundary- buster dad, who breaks down the personal boundaries of his children with abuse. These children then have problems communicating boundaries with others and also have difficulty trusting any one. They also have high tolerance for chaos and put up with a lot of abuse before acknowledging there is a problem

Next is the critical dad. This one does not accept the child he has and compares the child with others because he doesn't accept himself. He tries to live out his own failed dreams through the child, and ends up with a child that can exhibit poor self image and has a distorted image of God. The child often seems controlling and defensive.

Lastly, we have the shadow dad, who is physically present, but emotionally and essentially absent. He uses his own addictions to cope with his personal pain. This kind of father raises children who have problems with attachment and communication. His children communicate indirectly, and try to attach to un-attachable people, and can't receive from God and ultimately, anyone else.

It is worthy of note that over 75 percent of all males in prisons worldwide grew up without a father present, or without an involved father in their lives. This is not a statistic to be ignored.

Pay close attention to all members of the family to notice when one is not doing well emotionally and lovingly, patiently, draw the issues out of the person

Listen attentively when children express worry, fear or concern about self or any other person.

- Provide spiritual guidance
- In a situation where there is already an addict in the family, maintain a prayer covering over the person
- Avoid reporting the person to every elder in the family, friends or pastors
- Be approachable
- Lovingly confront when there is need
- Seek help
- Stop enabling
- Work through family issues that could be mitigating the need for a coping mechanism

What can the Church Do?

Only the church of Jesus Christ has the answer to addiction. I make this assertion because addiction is two sides of a coin.

On one side, it is a learned behaviour - no one becomes an addict overnight; it is by repetition that a habit is formed.

The bible says *"but strong meat belongs to them that are full of age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5 14).

It is by reason of use that the senses become exercised for good or for evil. So, a person picks up a stick of cigarette and continues smoking till he gets to a point where he is using 2 packs a day, and counting. The antidote to habits like this is discipleship, which the church is equipped for.

The second side of the coin is that addictions are demonically energized, perpetuated and propagated. The only people authorized to deal

with demons are members of the body of Christ, hence the assertion that only the church of Jesus Christ has the answer to addiction. In secular rehabs, the focus is on breaking the habit, but the demons behind the scenes remain entrenched and once the person comes out of rehab, all they have to do is trigger the person, and he just falls right back into the pattern of the addiction. On the other hand, the church also focuses on the demons and ignores the discipleship bit, which is why it also looks like the church is failing in restoring addicts to health. The church of Jesus needs to become equipped with information as well as the name of Jesus in dealing with the menace of addiction, so that she can tackle both the habit and the demons behind it.

The church can also stop ostracizing addicts, and start reaching out to them by setting up discipleship centres or ministries where they can be helped. The church has to return to being a place of grace rather than of Judgement, if the gospel of Christ is going to become real to this cross section of people. They are also ones for whom Christ died.

We must accept that prayer is not all that will help the addict and refer to appropriate quarters for more help and support. There is nothing wrong in accepting limits and becoming multi- disciplinary in helping people. Just as a pastor would refer a cancer patient to a doctor after prayer, the same

can be done for an addict by referring the person to a psychiatrist, psychologist, addictions therapist, or professional counsellor as the need may be.

Speak openly about these struggles from the pulpit, from a place of grace, not judgement, both in the adult, youth and childrens' churches. Church is a place where most instructions are believed, therefore, church should be a place of informing and educating about the dangers of addictions, backed by the Holy Scriptures. Also, most of the young people who show up at our rehab centre with addictions fell into it out of ignorance. If the caution signs are discussed openly, early enough, some will be spared the ordeal.

Set up accountability platforms for people within the church who struggle. Accountability is one of the most powerful tools in breaking out of addiction. It is sometimes called the power-up principle, the concept being drawn from the scriptures in

Ecclesiastes chapter 4: 9- 10

*"Two are better than one,
Because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down,
His friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls*

And has no one to help him up"

This is allowing others to really help the addict to stand against the struggle.

This is also seen in James 5: 16

"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

The power of addiction is secrecy and until light is shone, darkness will preside. Opening up to another person rather than keeping a struggle a secret is being accountable, and the addiction begins to lose its grip when exposed. The other person stands in the gap to pray for the struggler, and also, lovingly confronts when the addict is drifting.

Caution Signs

These are some of the signs to look out for in recognising either the onset or presence of addiction in a person.

Physical signs

- Over-activity or under-activity, depending on the drug of choice
- Repetitive speech patterns
- Reddening of the eyes and/or dilated pupils
- Excessive sniffing and runny nose not brought on by a cold
- Looking pale and looking undernourished
- Weight loss
- Change in eating habits
- Lack of personal hygiene resulting in body odour

Behavioural signs

- Work or school problems
- Skipping school or work
- Missing important appointments or engagements
- Isolating self and being secretive
- Relationship and marital problems
- Discussions always centering around drug or alcohol use
- Financial problems- always needing money
- Legal problems
- Disruption in sleep patterns
- Emotional
- Obnoxious, silly, confused easily
- Loss of interest in people or things that used to be interesting
- Inability to deal with stress
- Denial
- Rationalizations
- Irritable and argumentative
- Blaming
- Diversion or deflection- changing the subject in order to avoid the subject of addiction.

Some of the less conventional substances being abused

There are some not so common drugs and substances being abused to get a high. While the known ones include cocaine, heroin, marijuana, crack cocaine, methamphetamines, codeine, tramadol, pentazocine, etc, there are others to pay attention to, especially among the youths.

The drink La Casera is a regular soft drink. But a combination of that and the sweet called TomTom produces an incredible high. Also La Casera and magi cubes. All these cost money, so people are devising free ones.

Some urinate in glass bottles, cork the bottles and leave to stand for ten days, then sniff the ammonia fumes that have had ten days to 'ferment'. Others simply go to a soak away pit, lie down and sniff the stench till they pass out.

Conclusion

Addiction is a tragedy that should not befall anyone or any family. However, the reality that stares us in the face is that it is all around us. We watch loved ones suffer and get sucked into all kinds of addictions and we are helpless to stem or stop the tide.

Take heart if your loved one is addicted, it is not the end of the world, because there is hope. Do not allow addiction to steal your loved one, find help immediately.

Be strong if you are addicted, do not allow addiction to steal your life, you can take your life back. Fight!

I seize this opportunity to call on all who care to get educated and equipped to help, because a great epidemic is being unleashed on us, and we must be prepared as the army of the Lord to contend for the souls of men against the evil one.

