

Addiction In America

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Addiction is rampant in the U.S.; check-out the following statistics:*

- There are more deaths and disabilities each year in the U.S. from substance abuse than from any other cause.
- About 18 million Americans have alcohol problems, about 5 to 6 million Americans have drug problems.
- More than half of all adults have a family history of alcoholism or problem drinking.
- More than 9 million children live with a parent dependent on alcohol and/or illicit drugs.

In truth, few would argue that addiction is a monumental problem for America; the question is, what can be done about it? For those serving in ministry, the first line of defense is education. Addiction is a rather complex type of sin, with significant physio-

logical ramifications. From the psychological perspective, addiction involves an intricate web of self-deception made-up of: denial, repression and rationalization. Neurologically, addiction alters the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information. In the case of addictions involving a substance, the substance can: 1.) imitate the brain's natural chemical messengers, and/or 2.) over-stimulate the "reward circuit" of the brain. In the case of addictive behaviors involving non-substances (e.g. gambling, shopping, pornography, etc.), the brain still undergoes restructuring involving feedback, habituation and issues relating to tolerance, that produce mood-altering affects. A good resource I recommend for clergy is the book by Dr. Gerald May, titled Addiction & Grace (HarperOne, 1988). While it was written a while back, it remains an excellent resource when counseling from the Christian perspective.

Second, addiction equates to crippling sin, with plenty of shame, so the addict tends to keep the problem hidden. From a Christian counselor's perspective, when addiction is suspected, it is best to confront the issue head-on (Eph. 5:11). One must be care not to fall into the trap of codependency with a counselee/parishioner who is struggling with addiction (see Gal. 6:1).

Third, the addict cannot solve this issue on their own. If it were as simple a matter as willpower, the addict would have stopped the behavior long ago, due to the pain of shame. The addict needs God, as well as a network of support (Gal. 6:2). A wonderful resource for those struggling with addiction is Celebrate Recovery, you can visit their website at: www.celebraterecovery.com.

*Source: http://www.co.kern.ca.us/kcmh/substance_abuse.asp

Codependency— Stop the Madness

It has been suggested that those who are in relationship with a loved-one struggling with addiction, are as sick or sicker than the addict themselves. I believe this to be true. Not only are family members and friends having to put-up with the destructive ways of the addict; they often times are doing it sober. On

the other hand, the addict can turn to their drug-of-choice to numb their emotions, and ease their fears.

Without knowing it, many times family members and friends actually do more to contribute to their loved-one's addiction than not. While their intentions are often times good, their caretaking and

rescuing behaviors equate to enabling; which allows the addict to continue-on.

One of the most widely read books on the issue of Codependency is Codependent No More (Hazelden, 1992). If you have not read this book, I would encourage you to do so.

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The Deceptive Web of Addiction



When the devil seeks to ensnare someone through addiction, the attack occurs on two fronts. One front is the individual's will (i.e. the capacity to choose and direct one's own behavior). The second front is the individual's self-esteem. In effect, through addiction Satan splits the addict's will in two; one side seeks freedom, the other desires to continue in the addiction. Over time, this internal battle wears away at the individual's self-esteem (i.e. their sense of worth).

In order for the addicted person to continue in their addiction, they must weave a web of self-deception; which is typically made-up of: denial,

repression and rationalization. In the early stages of denial, the person works to ignore/reject the signs of increased usage of the substance or behavior (e.g. sex, shopping, gambling, etc.).

Eventually denial gives way to reality and the individual can no longer deny the truth of their increasing use and struggle with manageability. This is where repression comes in. Here, the addict works to keep themselves preoccupied and busy as a means to prevent thinking about the reality of their struggle.

Ultimately, denial and repression fail and the addict can no longer deny

and repress the truth of their addiction. At this point, there are two options: 1.) admit they have a problem and seek help; or 2.) work to rationalize (i.e. make excuses) as a means to justify the addictive behavior.

Over-and-over again this web of deception is spun. The addict finds themselves stuck and in despair. This is why the first step in treating addiction is to break down the addict's denial. Then, and only then, can the individual begin to allow God to work in their life and find the strength to stand firm and no longer submit to their yoke of slavery (see Gal. 5:1).

“...where
your treasure
is, there will
your heart be
also.”

– Matthew 6:21

Treasure Hunting

The Greek word used for treasure in Matthew 6:21 is—*thesaurus* (thay-sow-ros'), meaning: a deposit, as in depositing wealth. Where we deposit our time, talents and—yes, our wealth, there too will we find our heart (i.e. our thoughts and emotions). Our adversary, the devil, knows this to be a fact, so he looks for ways to deceive us into storing-up our treasure in locations other than our relationship with God.

Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:24, NIV). The challenge with addiction is that it becomes our god. Where we face addictions, there our time and talents will lie.

Sadly, addiction robs us of our treasure; it robs those we're in relationship with of love, joy and

peace; certainly, it robs God of that which He desires—an intimate relationship with us. Yet, everything about addiction is a lie. For this reason, the unfruitful works of darkness must be brought-out into the light (see Ephesians 5:11). In order to recover our lost treasure, addiction must first be acknowledge for what it has wrought, and support for moving-off of the addiction must be sought.



Faith

The purest acts of faith always feel like risks. Instead of leading to absolute quietude and serenity, true spiritual growth is characterized by increasingly deep risk taking. Growth in faith means willingness to trust God more and more, not only in those areas of our lives where we are most successful, but also, and most significantly, at those levels where we

are most vulnerable, wounded, and weak. It is where our personal power seems most defeated that we are given the most profound opportunities to act in true faith. The purest faith is enacted when all we can choose is to relax our hands or clench them, to turn wordlessly toward or away from God. This tiny option, the faith Jesus measured as the size of a

mustard seed, is where grace and the human spirit embrace in absolute perfection and explode in world-changing power.

Excerpt: *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. By Gerald G. May, M.D. HarperOne, 1988.

Grateful Addict

This week, millions of people who struggle with addiction will group together across this great land of ours. In a majority of these meetings you'll hear something that seems very much out-of-place. It starts innocuous enough, "High, I'm so-and-so..." but then you hear it, "I'm a grateful alcoholic"—or addict, etc. How could it be that an individual who struggles with such a significant issue like addiction even remotely be grateful for such a thing?

At first, this gratitude does not

seem to add-up; yet, what these individuals understand is that through their struggles with addic-



tion, they have come to know God in a way they might never had otherwise. Perhaps it has to do with

the fact that through our weakness, God's strength is made perfect (see II Cor. 12:9); more specifically, we experience the perfect strength of our Heavenly Father through our weaknesses. His grace really is sufficient for us; for through God's grace, we are filled with a strength that is beyond us. Repeated encounters with such grace softens the heart and leaves one feeling grateful for the thorn in their side.

"It is estimated there are 10.8 million underage drinkers in the U.S."

The Facts on Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol affects every organ in the body. It is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream. Alcohol is metabolized in the liver by enzymes; however, the liver can only metabolize a small amount of alcohol at a time, leaving the excess alcohol to circulate throughout the body. The intensity of the effect of alcohol on the body is directly related to the amount consumed.

Prolonged, heavy use of alcohol can lead to addiction (alcoholism). Sudden cessation of long term, extensive alcohol intake is likely to produce withdrawal symptoms, including severe anxiety, tremors, hallucinations, and convulsions.

Long-term effects of consuming large quantities of alcohol can lead to:

- Permanent damage to vital organs
- Several different types of cancer

- Gastrointestinal irritations, such as nausea, diarrhea, and ulcers
- Malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies
- Sexual dysfunctions
- High blood pressure
- Lowered resistance to disease

Mothers who drink alcohol during pregnancy may give birth to infants with fetal alcohol syndrome. These infants may suffer from mental retardation and other irreversible physical abnormalities. In addition, research indicates that children of alcoholic parents are at greater risk than other children of becoming alcoholics.

It is estimated there are 10.8 million underage drinkers in the U.S. Among high school students, those who bring drink frequently are at higher risk for the following outcomes:

- Risky sexual behavior

- Assaults
- Sexual Assaults
- Injuries
- Academic problems
- Legal problems

In the U.S., an estimated 5,000 individuals under age 21 die each year from injuries caused by underage drinking. These include:

- Motor vehicle crashes (aprox. 1900 deaths)
- Homicides (aprox. 1600 deaths)
- Suicides (aprox. 300 deaths)

Of all people who ever meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependency in their lifetime, nearly half do so by age 21 and two-thirds by age 25.

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse & Addiction.



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Kingdom Community Ministries (KCM) exists to serve the Body of Christ by offering biblically-based, Christ-centered counseling services. Our mission is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ by bringing counselees into a personal relationship with the Lord; and helping them to overcome the crippling effects of sin and guilt. KCM counselors are licensed ministers with graduate level degrees in: **Ministry with emphasis in Christian Counseling; however, we are not licensed psychotherapists.** We offer evening appointments, and a sliding scale payment plan for those who qualify. Your prayerful consideration of our services is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Through God—All Things are Possible

Twenty-five years ago, my siblings and I banded together with the help of a counselor to confront another family member about their drinking. While it was not easy for any of us to take such a risk and establish firm boundaries, I fully believe God strengthened us to do so. Out of love we confronted our family member and encouraged this individual to leave that very evening for a rehab facility we had made preparations with.

Going into the intervention, I had my doubts; more specifically, I had my fears. I was afraid for this person whom I love very much. I wanted them to get help so they could stop hurting themselves (and us too). Half way through the intervention it was a coin-toss (so-to-speak), it really could have gone either way. But in the end, God proved faithful—He answered all of our prayers. Our love-one made the choice to seek help. And in that mo-

ment, each of us felt a mixture of emotions. We were joyful and relieved, scared and apprehensive, exhausted yet re-energized all at the same time. But most of all, we were all grateful. God had done what none of us could have—He strengthened each and every person in the room that night. Each of us surrendered to Him—to His love, grace and mercy.

As you have read through this quarter's newsletter, the plethora of statistics on addiction might very well seem overwhelming. It may seem as though America is in over its head and the tide is rolling-in. Fact is, there is a lot of truth in this perspective; the figures are overwhelming. Another fact to consider is this—we're not going to overcome unless we lean on our Lord and Savior for strength and guidance. As Jesus said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." (Luke 18:27, NIV). However, we're not to idly sit by

and wait for God to do for us what we're unwilling to do for ourselves. Thus, we must work to develop an awareness of the issues—problems cannot be solved unless we're aware they exist. We also need to work on accepting things as they really are—not turning a blind-eye. Finally, with God's direction and strength, we must take action (see James 2:18).

I for one am sure glad my siblings and I took action some twenty-five years ago. I am grateful to the Lord for His provision of strength over the last twenty-five year; for all the strength my dear love-one has needed to practice sobriety for the last two and-a-half decades! Indeed, God is love (see 1 John 4:8)!

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