



Understanding Addiction Part 2 of 2

In last month's article, the topic of "Addiction" was introduced and several kinds of addictions were explored. This month, the focus will be on how these addictions are treated, and what believers can do to assist an individual struggling with an addiction.

F. Treatment and Success

1. Treatment for addictions is multifaceted. It needs to touch all areas of the addict's life.
 - a. Treatment success is greatly dependent upon the willingness and participation level of the addict.

- b. At times, failure in addiction treatment occurs because the treatment plan does not adequately address all of the necessary components. Just as in an iceberg, the part that is seen (outward behaviors) is fueled by what is underneath, and not seen (past trauma, secrets, mental issues, spiritual struggles, etc.) What is underneath is often much bigger than what is seen.



2. Spiritual Support: This includes teaching from a spiritual authority about sin and overcoming sin, establishing an accountability relationship, and obtaining spiritual support and encouragement from the church and church leadership.
 - a. Addicts must learn and live out the spiritual attributes of Accountability, Honesty, and Humility.

- i. Accountability: Refers to the addict's willingness to let others know what is going on in his/her life.
 - ii. Honesty: Refers to the addict's willingness to be 100% honest about his/her life and to break through denial and/or attempts to skirt the truth.
 - iii. Humility: Refers to the addict's need to submit himself/herself first to God and then to others. It is a recognition that he/she cannot overcome sin and addiction by himself/herself, takes responsibility for his/her actions (both past and current), and does not blame his/her behavior on others.



- b. At times, some addicts will give the appearance of being accountable, honest, and humble; however, promises and good intentions are not enough.
3. Group Activities: Group participation is a very useful tool in aiding recovery from an addiction. Groups can be led by a trained therapist, or they can be formed simply by individuals in various stages of recovery banding together for support.
- Support Groups: Sometimes attending a support group with people who are dealing with overcoming a similar problem can be very helpful. Addictions thrive in isolation. Therefore, addicts must develop healthy relationships wherein they can be edified, supported, and challenged.
 - Balancing the Influence: When an addict is attending a freestanding support group (e.g., AA), he/she should also meet regularly with support people from his/her local church. This helps avoid the situation in which the addict may feel like people outside of the church understand his/her struggles, but that people within the church don't. The goal is to have good continuity in the addict's support system.
4. Medical Treatment: This involves treatment for the substance. Examples include nicotine patches, sedatives, or methadone as a replacement drug for heroin. This may include inpatient treatment, medicine to control symptoms of withdrawal, medicine to reduce craving for drugs, etc.
5. Professional Counseling: This is face-to-face time from a person trained to work with addictions. This may include education about the nature of addictions, training for lifestyle changes, treatment for irrational or unhealthy thinking, and assistance at working through relationship and family issues.
- Treatment for irrational/unhealthy thinking is very important. Examples include recognizing how denial works and how to stop it, recognizing and overcoming self-worth issues, and recognizing misplaced priorities in the addict's life.
 - Addicts must learn to use healthy alternatives to the addictive agent. From one perspective, addictions can be understood as a way to cope (albeit a dysfunctional way). When the addictive behavior is stopped, the person's current coping skills are removed. Therefore, they must be replaced by Godly, healthy coping skills such as spiritual growth, healthy relationships, and physical exercise. Not having good replacement skills and activities leaves the person very vulnerable to relapse.
 - Treatment for associated issues is important regardless of whether those issues led to the addiction or were caused by it. (Remember the iceberg?) These issues could include: unresolved trauma, difficulty dealing with stress, marital problems, depression, anxiety, and more.
6. Family Counseling: Addictions at some point will inevitably affect the people closest to the addict.
- The addict's family often needs support and guidance in how to set healthy boundaries with the addict and to establish new patterns.

- b. Spouses of addicts often require the most specific assistance in learning how to separate themselves from the addiction and to avoid enabling or being entangled in the addiction cycle.
- c. If the addict has children, the children's needs should be attended to directly. Children of addicts oftentimes internalize many unhealthy and distorted messages about themselves, relationships, and even God.

G. Addictions and Mental Health

1. When a person has both a diagnosed mental illness and an addiction, it is referred to as "dual diagnosis."
2. Mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or depression can make someone more susceptible to becoming addicted.
3. When someone has dual diagnosis, lay people (and sometimes even professionals) may respond to the initial symptoms that are presented and not be aware of the second issue. That is, helpers may notice the addiction and not the mental health issue, or vice-versa.
4. If both the addiction and the mental health issues are not treated together, the likelihood for success is very poor. Whichever issue is not treated is likely to cause the other issue to reoccur.
5. It is important for family and friends to accept the need for both the mental health issues and addiction to be treated together. At times, significant others focus on one problem or the other in the belief that one issue is the "real problem."

H. Effective and Appropriate Spiritual Interventions

1. Prayer is essential. The person must commit to prayer for grace to overcome. Enlisting other believers to pray is fitting as well. Prayer for the struggling person may involve only family and friends, or it may involve the whole church if sharing is appropriate. *James 5:16*, ". . . *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"
2. Accountability and mentoring are necessary for support and awareness. When we know a specific person cares to engage in the struggle with us, we are more committed and encouraged. This knowledge also helps to increase an individual's level of awareness of personal responsibility. *James 5:16* "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*"
3. Church support needs to be present at whatever level is appropriate. The church needs to reject sin and embrace the sinner. Because addictions are hard to understand and/or when it involves an addictive agent which we abhor, the church may withdraw because it doesn't realize the nature of addictions or because it is judgmental. The church needs to be encouraged to support the person without condoning the behavior. *1 Peter 4:8* "*And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*"
4. Good communication between the elder/ministers and the addict's counselors can help to obtain a better outcome.

5. The person may need hospitalization or residential treatment for withdrawal, chemical replacement, removal from access to temptation, or for intense counseling and teaching. Brothers and sisters of the church can assist by visiting or sending cards.
6. The addict's family needs to feel the support of the church family. Parents, spouses, and children often need prayer and the opportunity to talk with someone.
7. If the help and input of an elder/minister is desired by an addict or his/her family, call the elder/minister directly and inform him of the need. Don't assume he automatically knows how you want him to respond.

Addictions is difficult area for us to understand and work through. The "mountain" which is created by these issues can seem overwhelming. However, with Gods' grace, Godly help from others, and the determination of the individual involved, this mountain can be overcome as we rest on God's promise in *Matthew 19:26*, "...*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*"

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ACCFS has numerous resources to assist someone who is going through the battle with addiction. We also provide help for the loved ones surrounding this individual. One such resource, *Three Keys to Addiction Recovery*, emphasizes the need for accountability, honesty, and humility in this fight. For more information and resources, please visit our website at www.accounseling.org/addiction.