

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Jan. 30: Addiction is the beginning of destruction_12405

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Addiction is the beginning of destruction

Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-21, 29-33; Romans 14:19-20; Ephesians 5:15-18

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A familiar adage says, "One bad habit leads to another." A habit is an acquired repetition of a behavior pattern that can become involuntary. Addiction is to surrender one's self to a physical or emotional habit of obsession, in this application, to drugs (alcohol is a drug). No substance abuser ever started out to be an addict, yet everyone is susceptible. Drug addiction is a slow suicide, a slow ride to perdition. There are no old junkies.

Ordinarily, addiction is a process that begins with experimentation with alcohol or drugs, with occasional use increasing to full-blown addiction. Many cocaine addicts admit addiction came almost immediately with first

use of cocaine. An alcohol user may take years to reach alcoholism. Adolescents, with less will power and coping skill, move through the cycle to addiction much faster than adults.



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There are many reasons addicts start to use drugs, such as peer approval, curiosity, experimentation, depression, lack of self-esteem, easy accessibility, a dysfunctional family, parental drug abuse, cultural influences such as television and movies, or a lack of moral values. Substance abuse often is an attempt to escape from an unpleasant, burdensome and intolerable situation. Drugs are a quick way to temporarily "get away from it all," and to find relief from troubles and pain through self-anesthetization.

The problem is that there is no escape from reality. Many people rise above all of these situations and avoid addiction; others give in to the temptation until the obsession is uncontrollable. Addiction usually is a social experience where a person wants to be accepted and have a sense of belonging. A drug addict most likely will come from a home where there is no father figure, or a home where discipline is either too harsh or too lenient.

However, a healthy home environment does not guarantee a child will be free of addiction. The adolescent years can take their toll on a teenager's self-esteem and emotional development. If a youth has a sense of personal inferiority, real or imagined, he or she is more easily tempted to try drugs.

Recovery from addiction requires a spiritual experience to get rid of the controlling beast inside. Scripture gives some powerful spiritual principles that insightfully assist in avoiding addiction. Four have been chosen for this lesson.

Exercise wisdom (Proverbs 20:1)

The writer of Proverbs encourages the reader to use the mind and warns against excessive use of alcohol, in this case "wine" and "beer" ("strong drink" in KJV). "Mocker" can be translated as "scorner," which is a very emotional word of anger and disgust. The statement, "Wine is a mocker" is an angry warning of rejection and disaster and an expression of extreme contempt. "Brawler" means one who fights loudly or quarrels in loud confusion. The imagery is not becoming of the drunk who rages out of control, stumbles in his steps, mumbles with slurred speech and is dull, hostile and dim-witted. A drunk is the very opposite of wisdom. Response to the drunkard is usually pity, amusement, disdain, anger and rejection. No one is wise to place himself in such an inebriated state.

The moral philosophy, "If it feels good, do it," is a natural expression of the carnal nature. Feelings often become the key operative of life. Feelings are the way drugs take over while diminishing the rational, thinking part of personality. Feelings become like a disease. The feeling of pleasure received from using drugs is the subtle, destructive and damning deceiver.

God gave us reason, will and emotion. Emotion, or feeling, was never intended to be an adequate guide for decision-making. Feelings are fickle and change with every circumstance like a reed in the wind. When feeling

is the focus of life, the tail is wagging the dog. Acting out of emotion or feelings without the benefit of fact is the harbinger of poor choices and critical failure.

Experimentation with a drug brings some feelings of pleasure and euphoria but when repeated enough becomes insidiously destructive to the addict, his family and society. If drugs and alcohol are tried and the feeling is liked, then the stage is set for possible addiction.

Frequently, the experienced user will coach the inexperienced user on how to make drugs even more enjoyable. Each step to more frequent use, along with the use of different kinds of drugs, increases the probability of emotional or physical dependency. Dependency brings a feeling of worthlessness, self-loathing, failure, insecurity, doubt, arrogance, paranoia, belligerence, denial and suicide.

In order to overcome the powerful feelings just described, the addict uses more and more drugs. The cycle is now complete and happens over and over and over again like a whirlwind, pushing the user into a spiraling downward swirl to devastation and ruin. Nothing else matters. Sleepless nights and waking hours are used to determine how to connect with the next fix.

This merry-go-round is relentless. Belongings are hocked, theft and forgery are practiced, lying and cheating become behavioral norms. Paranoia, guilt and denial dominate the personality. The only prospect for life is more drugs. What started out as a dream for a little fun has turned into the worst possible nightmare.

Wisdom's discipline and will power's force are much more serving of our needs and should guide our emotions to the best things in life rather than addictions which destroy.

Watch out! (Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-33)

Be wise and watch out “for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags” (v. 21). This proverb describes the troubles and losses of the substance abuser very vividly. The writer paints such a picture to encourage the bibber to leave alcohol (and drugs) alone.

The seriousness of the addiction is substantiated by the losses incurred—loss of focus, fortune, family and friends. Once the drug takes control, it becomes the addict’s god, father, mother, sister, lover, friend and the all-consuming reason to exist. The substance abuser eventually loses everything. Poverty (v. 21), woe, sorrow, strife and physical stress (v. 29) are the eventual reward.

People who never experiment or try drugs never become addictive. One never knows who will become the addict. If you were to board an airplane and the stewardess were to say, “You are welcome to fly with us, but on the journey one of ever 12 seats will fall out on the way,” the airplane would leave empty. Yet, one of every 12 individuals who drink socially will become an alcoholic, and hundreds of thousands get on board every day.

The pleasure gained at the beginning will not be a blessing in the end. If you play with fire, you will get burned. Drugs “sparkle” and go “down smoothly,” but “in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper” (v. 32). Yet, the drunkard’s strange visions, fights, physical pain and emotional loss do not keep him from seeking another drink (vv. 33-35). We should keep a close physical, emotional and spiritual lookout for the things of pleasure that ultimately turn us into addicts.

Consider others (Romans 14:19-21)

Addiction is a very selfish thing. Addicts do not think like normal people. To the addict, the need for drugs dominates any relationship. To lose a loved

one to substance abuse can be worse than death because the addict lives and is a constant reminder of personal failure. Everyone around the addict feels a sense of guilt and responsibility for the addiction. The grief is intense because of the interjection of anger, abandonment, emptiness, resentment, rejection, helplessness, hostility, disappointment, doubt, depression and denial.

The impact upon family and friends is enormous. Once addicted, the substance abuser's concern for others is limited by the obsession for drugs and a "me-first" attitude.

Paul gave us one of the great principles of decision-making here in this passage, the principle of placing others before one's own wants or desires. Concern for others puts moral limits upon our behavior. We should "make every effort to edify others (v. 19).

Paul gets high on freedom and voluntary submission, choosing to be responsible for another's sake (his ultimate example is Christ who "did not please himself," Romans 15:3). All foods are clean for eating, but if to eat them causes someone else to stumble or experience pain, then the food (drugs) should not be consumed. An action may not violate your conscience, but if it violates another whom you are seeking to nurture in the Lord, then that action should not be taken. Freedom in Christ allows some things to be done, but if that freedom is objectionable to someone else then, in the same freedom, refrain from doing it.

Personal sacrifice is little to give up in order to show love in behalf of others. That is the very nature of love. Don't forfeit your witness by grieving the other party for "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking" (v. 17). Consideration of others should provide some incentive for never getting on drugs.

Submit to the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:15-18)

Contrasting foolish drunkenness with being filled with the Holy Spirit (see similar comparison in Acts 2:1-13), Paul calls us to wisdom (v. 15) and obedience to the will of God (v. 17). God's will and Spirit would never lead down the path of substance abuse. The feeling of pleasure and euphoria from the Holy Spirit within us is a complement Christ, through his salvation, has given to all who believe. Rather than being deceived by the pleasure of strong drink that destroys, be filled with the Holy Spirit that guides in righteousness, convicts of sin, builds up the church and blesses the individual.

Discussion question

- ◆ Is a spiritual component necessary to overcome addiction?
- ◆ Are other addictions as damaging as drugs and alcohol?
- ◆ Those who are addicted in large measure "chose their poison." Why not just write them off?

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