

How to walk alongside people recovering from addiction

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As a young single mother, I remember crying out to God from a place of desperation, asking him to help change my life—specifically, to take away the addiction to opioids that clung so tightly.

What addiction is

Some see addiction as a disease that stems from biological factors. Others see it as a moral failing that stems from the choice to sin against God. Addiction, however, is formed through various influences in a person's life, including biological, psychological, spiritual and social factors.

Addiction does not discriminate by color, background, status or gender.

Addiction to alcohol or drugs [is characterized](#) by the repeated use of the substance, despite consequences that include personal loss, harm to oneself or others, and damage to property.

The word “addiction” is derived from the Latin word *addicere*, which means to have no voice and to surrender oneself to a master.

Paul's self-description in Romans 7 fits addiction very well. He did not understand what he did. He did what he did not want to do, even doing the very thing he hated.

Paul wrote: “For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but willpower is not enough to accomplish it” (Romans 7:18, The Passion Translation).

If we know this is true for Paul, then we know it can be true for us.

Biological and social components of addiction

Drug and/or alcohol use interrupts the development of the brain—specifically, the connections between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system. When individuals are living in addiction, they usually are driven by what feels good and lack the knowledge they need to make rational decisions.

People who have experienced trauma are three times more likely to develop a substance use disorder. Individuals with addiction often have learned and developed behaviors either to numb trauma experienced or to avoid or escape the reality of their current conditions.

When an individual reaches a place of desperation or desire for change, there typically is a rebuilding phase, or recovery, that has to occur. Recovery is the process of sustaining abstinence from substances, while learning and practicing the awareness and skills necessary to live a whole, healthy and healed life.

The church's part in my recovery

In my own journey, I can say confidently I was restored immediately to my Father and Savior, Jesus Christ. However, there was a process of recovery I had to walk for the sake of my holistic health, not just spiritual health.

Recovery often involves completely starting over. I had to change everything about my life. This included my environment, friends, routines, behaviors, thoughts, spending habits, responsibilities, how I spent my time, etc. I could not have done it without a hopeful community, a church that

surrounded me and believed in me.

As I committed myself to my faith and deepened my relationship with other Christ-followers, I experienced a sense of acceptance and faithfulness to the well-being of my young daughter and myself. This was a critical component for us, since we lacked a strong support system elsewhere. Church members helped me grow in my values, which led me to becoming the mother I desired to be.

Though my church loved me and wanted to help, they lacked understanding of trauma, addiction and the process of recovery.

Guidance for congregations

Just as individuals with addiction must have endurance to sustain recovery, so must the congregations who come alongside them.

The following are practical suggestions for engaging in recovery:

- Seek education about [what addiction is](#) and how it affects the brain. This will give you more empathy and understanding as you support this community.
- Start having conversations around this topic, being mindful of the language used about addiction and recovery. Language shapes how a congregation approaches a topic. Learn more about [addiction and recovery language here](#).
- Be willing to commit and walk patiently with those seeking recovery. The recovery process is not linear. We must commit to taking this journey together.
- Connect with community organizations, and host groups, classes, programs, etc. Find professionals in your community working with

individuals in recovery, and find ways to partner with them. Through this, your congregation can become a safe place for those within the recovery community.

Churches, we have the opportunity to stand with those seeking recovery. We can be a part of breaking off shame and stigma falsely accusing those with addiction that they are not good enough to receive God's love.

For more resources on congregations and the recovery community, please visit The Center for Church and Community Impact's [resource page](#).

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