

Christadelphian Caring Network Bulletin



Fall 2013

Clinical Perspective of Addictions

Definition of Addiction

Addiction is continued use of a substance or a continued behaviour despite the harmful consequences

OR, put simply

- Craving
- Loss of Control of amount or frequency of use
- Compulsion to use
- Use despite Consequences

An addiction can manifest itself in a number of ways:

- We can have compulsions.
- Our self-control becomes impaired.
- We are persistent in the pursuit of our needs.
- We become very irritable if these perceived needs are not met.

Our Care Line is open for calls. Caring brothers and sisters are ready for your call. Our toll-free support line is 866-823-1039.

The Christadelphian Caring Network of Canada is a registered charity that depends solely on volunteers and covers its operating expenses through donations. Tax-receipted donations can be made to the Christadelphian Caring Network and sent to Bob Chisholm, 2206 Donald Rd., Burlington, ON L7M 3R9

Understanding Addictions

Caring Strategies for Caregivers helping Family and Ecclesial Members

In April the Caring Network hosted a seminar on the subject of "Understanding Addictions". This bulletin is a summary based on that seminar. There were four components to the presentation:

1. A Biblical Perspective
2. A Clinical Perspective
3. Testimonials by Brothers or Sisters Who are Coping With An Addiction
4. A Panel Discussion.

A Biblical Perspective

(Based on Ralph Diliberto's presentation at the Caring Network Seminar, April 20, 2013)

There are at least five aspects to the Biblical perspective on addictions. These are as follows:

1. Recognition of the root cause of all addictions----sin-prone human nature.
2. Recognition that we are *all* affected by our propensity to sin and are susceptible to addictions, and we *all* need help and a remedy to deal with this condition.
3. The need to be open and to suspend judgmental attitudes in encouraging others to seek help for their addictions.
4. The need for patience, forbearance, and forgiveness in dealing with those trying to recover from addictions and to encourage them to embrace the motto, "Never give up!"
5. Recognition of the importance of our duty to help others who are struggling.

1. Recognition of the root cause of all addictions----Sin-prone human nature

Believers in the Bible recognize that the root cause of all human problems is our propensity to sin, as a result of the sin impulse that is inherent in every human being. We understand that God created a world that was very good and where the first human pair lived in harmony with creation and with their Creator.

They were given one command: Do not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, they violated this commandment by choosing their own way rather than God's way, and suffered the consequences. The very good state was replaced with a sin-cursed world of suffering, struggle, pain, and death. They now had a greater propensity to choose their own way rather than God's way. This

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Two Significant Signs or Symptoms of Addiction:

1. Harmful Consequences

Harmful consequences can range from mild to severe and, may appear to have little impact each time of use but can build up over time and use.

Examples of harmful consequences include:

- Injuries while under the influence
- Feelings of anxiety, irritability or depression
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Blackouts
- Problems with relationships
- Spending money on substances rather than on food, rent, or other essentials
- Legal problems related to substance use
- Loss of hope, feelings of emptiness

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A Biblical Perspective, continued

mortal nature with its propensity to sin was passed on to all their descendants including you and me. This means we are all affected. We all have a problem. (See Genesis 1 -3) The apostle Paul expressed very well in Romans ch. 7 how this problem impacts even the more spiritually-minded.

I know that God's standards are spiritual, but I have a corrupt nature, sold as a slave to sin. I don't realize what I'm doing. I don't do what I want to do. Instead, I do what I hate. I don't do what I want to do, but I agree that God's standards are good. So I am no longer the one who is doing the things I hate, but sin that lives in me is doing them. I know that nothing good lives in me; that is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don't do it. I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I don't want to do. Now, when I do what I don't want to do, I am no longer the one who is doing it. Sin that lives in me is doing it. So I've discovered this truth: Evil is present with me even when I want to do what God's standards say is good. I take pleasure in God's standards in my inner being. However, I see a different standard at work throughout my body. It is at war with the standards my mind sets and tries to take me captive to sin's standards which still exist throughout my body. (Rom. 7:14-23 GWV---God's Word Version)

2. Recognition that we are **all** susceptible to addictions, and we **all** need help and a remedy to deal with this condition.

Since we are all affected by our propensity to sin, we are all vulnerable to the problems that befall human beings including addictions. None of us is immune. Only one man was able to overcome the pull of the flesh-----our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is good news for human beings. God recognized our serious predicament and provided a way of escape from the ultimate consequences of our bad choices. After the first human pair sinned, He promised that a special "seed" or human descendant would come who would defeat sin and overcome death (Gen. 3:15).

Furthermore, He promised that just as the bad choice of one man (Adam) brought serious negative consequences for all human beings, so the consistently good choices of another man (Christ) bring hope, redemption, forgiveness and life. The apostle Paul expressed it this way: *"It is certain that death ruled because of one person's failure. It's even more certain that those who receive God's overflowing kindness and the gift of his approval will rule in life because of one person, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17 GWV)* Likewise, he says in the concluding verses of Rom. 7, *"What a miserable person I am! Who will rescue me from my dying?"* There is hope for every human being, regardless of our current condition.

3. The need for openness, approachability and a willingness to suspend being judgmental

Addiction can be defined as "an excessive behavior which gives a counterfeit, temporary sensation which is a substitute for, and undermines, the purpose for which we were really created." We were created to give God glory, to become part of His family, to reflect His thinking and to spend eternity with Him. When we fall prey to addictions we need to find a way out. However, barriers may exist that block our way. One of the chief barriers is often a profound sense of shame and inadequacy. We need to recognize our problem and then seek help. But seeking help will often only be

2. Loss of Control

The person may be aware their use is problematic but continue to use even when they want to stop. The person may not be aware it is problematic, otherwise known as being in denial

Stages of Change

Pre-contemplation (Not thinking about changing)

- Surprised that others may think that change is necessary
- Benefits of not changing outweigh the benefits of changing

Contemplation (Thinking about changing)

- Ambivalent about changing

Determination (Preparing to change)

- Decision has been made to change
- Realization that the risks of continuing with behaviour outweigh the benefits

Action (Change Phase)

- Change is either in process or has been accomplished for a short period of time

Maintenance (Maintaining the change)

- Change is maintained with minimal effort

Relapse (A setback or slip)

- Movement back to one of the previous stages. It is most helpful to think of this as a normal part of the process – a learning experience

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A Biblical Perspective, continued

possible if those we wish to confide in are perceived as being open, approachable and willing to suspend judging us. If we look at the example of our Lord and Master, He shows us the proper approach. In the parable of the lost son, the father was so anxious to recover his son that he almost made a spectacle of himself in the way he ran to embrace his son. His greeting did not focus on condemning his son for what he had done. What gives us comfort is that the actions of the father in the parable are representative of how God responds to us. Likewise, when our Lord dealt with the woman taken in adultery, he did not condemn her; he encouraged her to take corrective action. If we are not willing to take this approach, we may drive those who struggle with an addiction away from our community and even cause them to consider a destructive solution like suicide.

4 The need for patience, forbearance, and forgiveness in dealing with those trying to recover from addictions to encourage them to never give up.

Once a person has recognized he/she has a problem, made others aware of the problem, and sought help, it is almost inevitable that there will be setbacks. Recovery from an addiction is rarely a straight line of continual improvement. More often it is a case of one and a half steps forward and one step back. Those interacting with a person recovering from an addiction need to be very patient, forbearing, and forgiving. Again, our Lord showed us the forbearance we must be willing to extend to others when he answered a question that Peter put to him about being wronged by a brother:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked him, "Lord, how often do I have to forgive a believer who wrongs me? Seven times?" Jesus answered him, "I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy times seven." (Matt. 18: 21-22 GWV)

Jesus then gives this parable of the king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants who owed him large sums of money:

"That is why the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to do this, a servant who owed him millions of dollars was brought to him. Because he could not pay off the debt, the master ordered him, his wife, his children, and all that he had to be sold to pay off the account. Then the servant fell at his master's feet and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay everything!' "The master felt sorry for his servant, freed him, and canceled his debt.

But when that servant went away, he found a servant who owed him hundreds of dollars. He grabbed the servant he found and began to choke him. 'Pay what you owe!' he said. "Then that other servant fell at his feet and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will repay you.' But he refused. Instead, he turned away and had that servant put into prison until he would repay what he owed. "The other servants who worked with him saw what had happened and felt very sad. They told their master the whole story. "Then his master sent for him and said to him, 'You evil servant! I canceled your entire debt, because you begged me. Shouldn't you have treated the other servant as mercifully as I treated you?' "His master was so angry that he handed him over to the torturers until he would repay everything that he owed. That is what my Father in heaven will do to you if each of you does not sincerely forgive other believers." (Matt. 18: 23-35 GWV)

Our Master teaches us in this parable that if we expect our Heavenly Father to be patient, forbearing, and forgiving towards us, then we must be patient, forbearing, and forgiving towards others. This includes those struggling with addictions who

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How Do We Respond to Someone Who May Have an Addiction?

Don't ignore the problem
Do raise your concerns with the person and let them know you are available to listen

Don't argue with the person
Do provide factual information about the problem. If the person gets angry or denies there is a problem be patient but persistent

Don't judge the person
Do be positive and encourage change instead of blaming the person or making them feel guilty

Don't push for change
Do find out about available treatment programs and tell the person about them. He or she must be the one to decide to go.

How Can We Support Someone Who is Recovering from an Addiction?

It takes courage to admit that a change is needed and to work at making the change happen. It helps to:

Express confidence that the person can make the change

Give assistance with practical problems like finding housing, a job, or transportation to support groups

Be a good listener and try not to make judgments

Work with the person to make plans for handling situations where relapse may occur

Celebrate small successes

Pray for, and with them!

A Biblical Perspective, continued

backslide and fall on their face. We must be willing to help pick them up and encourage them to return to the path of recovery.

5. Recognizing our responsibilities as brothers and sisters in Christ to help others in our ecclesial community:

This last Biblical principle highlights the imperative we have to be involved in trying to help God's struggling servants. Jesus illustrated this imperative in the words he gave us that are recorded in Matt 25: "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. The people of every nation will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right but the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, my Father has blessed you! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me into your home. I needed clothes, and you gave me something to wear. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'*" Then the people who have God's approval will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and take you into our homes or see you in need of clothes and give you something to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "The king will answer them, 'I can guarantee this truth: Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did for me.' (Matt 25:34-40 GWV)

Jesus clearly teaches us that when we help a struggling member of our community, it is as if we were helping our Master himself. Likewise, if we withhold help and comfort, it is as if we were denying these things to our Master himself. These are very sobering thoughts and should propel us to act when help, encouragement, or comfort, are needed. In summary, God has promised His servants that He will not ignore their plight when they struggle. He says in Psalm 121: "*He will not let you fall. Your guardian will not fall asleep. Indeed, the Guardian of Israel never rests or sleeps ...The LORD is your guardian...The LORD guards you from every evil. He guards your life. The LORD guards you as you come and go, now and forever.*" But He uses us, His servants, to act as His agents to bring help and comfort to others who struggle with life's problems including addictions. Are we up for the task? For deep down, each one of us knows, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

Resources

http://www.camhx.ca/education/online_courses_webinars/mha101/introtoaddiction/Introduction_to_Addiction_.htm

http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health_information/a_z_mental_health_and_addiction_information/drug-use-addiction/Pages/addiction.aspx

Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline

[In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction](#) by Gabor Mate

[Love Her As She Is: Lessons from a Daughter Stolen by Addictions](#) by Patricia Morgan with Kelly Morgan