

How to Overcome Addiction

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[0 : 00] Hello, and welcome to the next in our series on biblical guidelines for daily living. And this week we're tackling the difficult problem of addiction. Addiction is a dirty word, no one, I guess, wants to admit having it, but it is rife in our communities, in our country, as it is in the world.

In South Africa alone, it's estimated that alcohol alone in South Africa costs our economy around 40 billion rand a year.

Now, stats in South Africa are difficult to come by, but here in the Western Cape we have huge problems with alcohol and drug abuse in our communities. And so we want to offer biblical help and see that the God of the universe does offer hope in what could be a hopeless situation.

As we start our time together, let's turn to him in prayer. Heavenly Father, life is sometimes really difficult. We battle with sin and we battle with addictions.

Lord, we turn to you and ask you for help. And just as you've saved many of us from our sinful lifestyles and things in our past that we could not escape ourselves, Lord, we want to offer hope for a drug and alcohol addicts.

[1 : 19] There is hope in you, Lord. There is hope in Christ. And so send us your Holy Spirit and remind us of who you are and of the hope that you offer in the gospel.

We pray these things in Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, I mentioned that addictions is like a dirty word. No one wants to admit having one. But the same goes for sin in the Christian life.

Sin and addiction are kind of the same thing. It's just addiction is a really intensified form of sin. But because God has come to save us from our sins, there is hope both for the addict as much as there is for the sinner who's not caught in addiction.

Although I'll try and get us to see that there really is a lot of overlap between the two. Addiction is really an intensified, specialized kind of form of sin, if you want to put it like that. So we need to define what addiction is.

And we need to see what it does to the human body. We want to see what are some of its causes. And then ultimately, what are the cures?

[2 : 21] Is there a way to fix addiction? And can the Bible and God help? Now, my background in this, it was working at an NGO called U-Turn that helps homeless people come off the street.

And the vast majority of them are addicted to either alcohol or drugs. And so we had to deal with that as I spent my time at U-Turn. There were some surprises for me there.

My training is in biblical theology. It's to be a preacher. But I had to learn some really big lessons about, I think, the complexity and the depth of sin. Once addiction gets hold, it really gets its claws into you.

And so you really need what's known as a multidisciplinary approach to fixing the problem. But let's define it first so we all know what we're speaking about. And there's going to be a constant conversation, I think, between the modern scientific medical models and the biblical one.

I'm going to kind of overlap between the two and see where there's overlap but where there is sometimes disagreement. So there's going to be agreement and disagreement between these two, I guess, disciplines in my talk today.

[3 : 30] Now, just to define it from the medical point of view, addiction is defined as a chronic relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug-seeking, continued use despite harmful consequences and long-lasting changes in the brain.

It is considered both a complex brain disorder and a mental illness. Addiction is the most severe form of a full spectrum of substance use disorders and is a medical illness caused by repeated misuse of a substance or substances.

Now, the main thing about addictions, when it's delivered in the form of alcohol or drugs or even the new plague of pornography, it does the same thing. It delivers a chemical jolt to the body that either takes away some kind of pain that you're feeling or helps you cope with your situation where you think you're not able to cope.

It either makes you more alert or it makes you more calm. It makes you feel less shy or more powerful. It makes you feel more capable or happier.

Now, we can be addicted to just about anything. In the past, addictions was really limited to alcohol, but with the rise of chemicals, addiction and drugs are one and the same thing.

[4 : 51] But we can be addicted to just about anything. For example, exercise, dieting, playing games or computer games specifically, sport, TV, reading, going clubbing, dancing.

We can be addicted to coffee, to chocolate, to shopping. You can be addicted to stealing and lying, to pills and pain meds. You can be addicted to work or success or money or pain or anger or love.

Now, this diagnosis, the medical diagnosis that says it's a mental illness, it's true, but that doesn't quite go deep enough to the root causes of the problem of addiction.

It doesn't get to the heart of the problem. And I guess from a Christian point of view, that's because the heart of the problem is the human heart. There's something deeply broken in us, and we need to look at what God says about that in order to fix that particular problem.

However, the definition, the medical definition is helpful because from the Christian point of view, when we just see the problem as sin, we sometimes have a kind of a superficial answer to the problem of addictions.

[6 : 03] In other words, there are many Christian groups that will just pray away the addiction and apply biblical texts. And so there's really many groups will just have Bible reading and prayer as the solution to your addiction.

And the problem is a little bit more complex than that, although that definitely forms part of the solution. Addiction, then, is both a physical problem and a spiritual problem, and we kind of have to tackle it on both of those levels.

Now let's look to see what the physical side of it, what it does to our brains when we take drugs. Now, essentially what drugs does is totally messes with our brain chemistry.

Now in a healthy brain, we've got these chemicals floating around. They're basically known as either inhibitors or exciters, chemicals like dopamine, which excite us and make us happy, or chemicals like endorphins, which relax us.

Now in a healthy brain, the amount of these chemicals is closely regulated. What drugs do is they totally mess with that. They literally make you go crazy, but it's all chemically driven.

[7 : 22] And through various mechanics, drugs either directly flood your brain with counterfeit chemicals, or they get your brain to produce too much of that one chemical, or they block your brain from absorbing the chemicals that are floating around there and regulating it in that way.

In other words, they just open the gateway to these chemicals to flood your brain, and the messages and everything gets scrambled up. The other problem is that they typically affect the areas in our brain associated with judgment, decision-making, learning, memory, and behavior control.

And they directly stimulate the reward path so that you want it again and again. One scary thing is, if you take enough of the chemicals of drugs, your brain realizes that it doesn't have to produce those chemicals anymore, and it stops.

And it awaits for you to introduce those chemicals into your brain, into your body, so that it doesn't have to produce them anymore. You can come off those drugs, but you have to, in a sense, rewire your brain into relearning how it needs to regulate those chemicals again, and how to find that happy or healthy balance, I should say.

Now, added to that is that many people start taking drugs in their pre-teen and early teenage years, when the brain itself is still going through changes. It's still developing. And you can see how seriously unhealthy it is and damaging to normal brain behavior, but especially when your brain is still developing and growing.

[8 : 52] One of the things that the health professionals say is that much of your cognitive and behavioral development is inhibited, stopped, even, when you take drugs. So the problem is, often, when you're seeing a grown human being, a drug addict is a grown person, biologically they're looking grown, but on the inside, in their brains, they often have the insight and the emotional capacity of a teenager, or even a pre-teenage.

Again, this makes proper care and treatment essential. It also makes it more complex and more long-term to get out of addiction. Now, many people think that to come out of addiction requires a short stint in rehab, and it's totally necessary and that helps, but it doesn't just take six weeks of being clean and then you're back on track again.

Your habits and behaviors and thought patterns have to be radically changed. You have to relearn many, many things that you've unlearned during your time as a drug addict. And this requires radical help and a huge amount of support.

Let's turn now and look at what are some of the causes of addiction. And here there's a really big debate. It's called the nature versus nurture debate, and that's the debate about whether you're born with a predisposition to drug addiction, and many people say that that's the case and they've located genes or they think they've located the genetic material that causes drug addiction.

And then the other part of that is the nurture. It's your upbringing. It's your environment. And it's not settled. It's an ongoing debate, although really I think what we're seeing these days is that people realize that there's a both-and situation.

[10 : 38] It's not either-or. For example, in the Western Cape, we've got one of the highest rates of fetal alcohol syndrome. And so predilection towards addiction, alcohol addiction, can start in the womb before you've even made a choice in your life because your mom is busy taking too much alcohol and it affects you directly from the womb.

But then family and community dynamics play a huge role in, I guess, predisposition towards taking drugs. We sometimes miss that and we think it's down to our own choice.

You know, no one is forcing you to take drugs. It comes down to whether you pick up that glass of alcohol and put it in. It comes down to whether you pick up the syringe and stick it into your arm or pop that pill.

You know, no one's forcing you to take drugs. And at some point, yes, you are responsible. But, you know, I remember there was one story in particular at U-Turn that helped me realize that there's a huge amount of factors influencing people as to whether they start taking drugs.

One lady called Hannah came to us from the street. She's got three little kids and her story is a terrible story of abuse and ending up in addiction.

[11 : 55] So just quickly to highlight that because it tells us how complex the situation is. So Hannah grew up in Mitchell's Plain with her mom. Now, her mom was a drug addict and so Hannah from a very early age didn't have a dad and she's got a drug addict mom.

And so there's neglect and abuse right from the start and she didn't ask to be born into that situation. There she had it. Hannah's mom got a boyfriend and it turned out that the boyfriend was able to deal cheaper drugs to her and that's why they shacked up.

And so Hannah's at home with a drug addict mom and a drug dealer dad. Now, again, she didn't ask for that but that's the situation that many people grow up in and what are you supposed to do.

What happened is eventually the drug dealer started molesting and abusing Hannah from an early age from about between 8, 9 and 10 into her teenage years.

Somehow, she got the courage to report this to the police and the abuser did go to jail. Hannah's mom was still on drugs and the only person that could give her the drugs at the price that she wanted was her drug dealer boyfriend who abused her child who's now in jail.

[13 : 07] and so she bailed him out brought him home so that she could get drugs again. Hannah realized, well, there's no hope here.

Where does she turn to? Who does she get hope or help from? And there was no one and so she ends up on the streets but now she's 16 or 15. How do you process that kind of things that are happening to you?

There's no healthy way to process that if you don't have help from the outside and she didn't and so she ends up on the streets she's got to start taking drugs to cope and she turned to prostitution because now there's no ways of getting money she's got to survive and so she came to us just in a totally abject state of needing help and so I think we've got to realize that when people are caught in drug addiction especially here in the Western Cape the problem of gangsterism and drugs in the communities where they come from is profound it has a huge impact in almost in a sense forcing them not inevitably but of helping them move in that direction really easily and so to tackle the problem of drug addiction in individuals in the Western Cape you've got to look at the community and at the family and to start solving problems there as well right so that's the definition of drug addiction we've seen what it does to the human brain and the human body we've seen some of the causes of it not all the causes but some of the drivers of it how do we fix it well one thing to realize about the problem with drug addiction is that drugs are not the problem we need to deal with the problem that causes drug addiction we've got to look at the background factors and even then we need to dig deeper still down to the underlying problems that causes the reaction that people take drugs and that's the problem of sin and that's where the bible comes in now sin comes from the inside and the outside and the outside influences are very strong so the causes of addiction that are outlined earlier those are the outside sinful influences no one asks for those things to be done to those children and yet it happens and now they've got to deal with that but then there's the inside sinful reaction that turns to drugs instead of turning to the

Lord and looking for help so we've spoken about the outside problem what about the inside problem now the bible is clear about where the root cause of the human condition lies and that problem lies in our hearts Jesus said don't you realize that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then is eliminated but the things that come out of the mouth from the heart these are the things that defile a man that make us unclean that hurt us for out of the heart come evil thoughts murder adultery sexual immorality theft false testimony and slander these are what defile a man but eating with unwashed hands does not defile him the bible gives us a storyline as to how man got into that situation it starts with creation and we were created good god made us to live on planet earth under his rule and so we were to listen to him and then implement what he wanted on planet earth and it's it's full of life and goodness and blessing so when we listen to god there's a right order to the relationships that we've got on earth the problem is it didn't stay that way for long in fact the order gets reversed instead of listening to god we started listening to ourselves number one and then we turn to the things of this world to find the goodness and the blessing in the life that comes from god and comes from living in obedience to god and we now live in a world of disorder where bad things happen and cause death and so sin is a kind of a listening disorder instead of listening to god we listen to ourselves to our desires and our appetites now when it comes to addiction instead of us ruling over the things of the world we are letting the things of the world rule over us addiction then is similar to sin it's a worship disorder when you listen to something you obey it instead of worshipping god we begin to worship something in the world and what you worship becomes your authority your god addiction is a worship disorder it's idolatry you are literally bowing down and offering your freedom your humanity and your freedom of choice to things in the created order and letting them control you but the bible also speaks about redemption about resetting that order in the right way god doesn't want to leave the world in the way it is with humans in the sorry state that they are especially in addiction god's heart is moved to both pity and anger at the mess that we make of our own lives he doesn't want us to see people living in slavery to the cravings of their own heart or the things of this world and he knows that the problem lies in our hearts and that's why he sent christ christ has come to restore our relationship with god to restore the broken order of things by dying on the cross he gets rid of our guilt and shame and by being resurrected from the dead he gives us the power to live a changed life and he does this by changing my heart and by giving us the holy spirit ultimately there is the new heavens and the earth to look forward to a new creation and the promise is that god is going to totally restore the created order back to it was in its original state god ruling over us us ruling over the world and nothing in the world that is going to tempt us and draw away our desires from him we won't struggle with sinful desires in the new world it's going to be just so relaxing and peaceful because nothing is going to draw us away from living in communion with god and with our fellow man and with the created order now god

comes in and makes these changes and my time at U-Turn has shown this again and again there are so many of the addicts that we helped that had come to christ and he started a new journey with them and of course we had to lead them and it was a journey it's a path you see there's a thing about change it's not easy it's not instantaneous and so there are christian rehab places that are a little bit too simplistic in the approach of just having the bible and prayer but and again you need that but you do need a holistic approach change is slow and messy but victory is promised and so let's turn to the bible now to see how god can help us romans chapter 6 our reading earlier says this you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness what benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of those things result in death but now that you've been set free from sin and become slaves of god the benefit you reap leads to holiness and the result is eternal life for the wages of sin is death but the gift of god is eternal life in christ jesus our lord when you ask jesus to help you there's a change that happens he takes out that sinful heart the thing that is drawn towards the things of this world and he gives you a new heart and his holy spirit you were a slave to sin but christ set you free but interestingly enough you don't become free to do what you want you become free to obey god the bible calls it slavery to god in a sense but god is a good slave master in fact he's our father slavery to god is freedom from sin and it's a very important topic to understand on that but this freedom is not easy and it's not without its difficult bits sin is strong and powerful and won't go down without a fight this whole section in romans is helpful for understanding how god works and how sin works in the next chapter paul goes on to say how strong sin is and how strong the kickback is once you've come to god he says this in romans 7 we know that the law is spiritual but i'm unspiritual sold as a slave to sin i do not understand what i do for what i want to do i do not do but what i hate i do for i have the desire to do what is good but i cannot carry it out for i do not do the good i want to do but the evil i do not want to do this i keep on doing this describes perfectly the fight of the drug addict but also of every christian battling with sin none of us is immune to this fight we are all in the same battle we need to take seriously the problem of sin and it's helpful to know that we know that god knows how difficult it is you know but is there a way out are we doomed to repeat the same cycle over and over and the answer is no there is a way out you can get better paul says this at the end of that section what a wretched man i am who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death thanks be to god who delivers me through jesus christ our lord and so ultimately when you come to christ there is hope for turning your back and turning away and staying turned and staying away although it is a daily thing that has to happen it it's continually in your life it's not just a once off and then everything is okay it's constant hard work but the promise is that god is there to help you do it every step of the way and it can be done i've seen it how many times happen to the people in our programs that whole section ends in romans chapter 8 saying this therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in christ jesus because through christ jesus the law of the spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of

[23 : 28] sin and death and there is ultimate freedom in christ he is so strong and if you compare the power of god with the power of sin so remember sin is part of the created world but who made all of this god so who's stronger god and christ and the holy spirit and our new heart as well as our new family that we come to when we become christians and that brings us to the next point in our journey of change if you will we need a community community and change are very important you can't do this by yourself you know we don't grow up to be normal healthy adults ourselves outside of community we get there by being supported in a family something that most drug addicts have never had and so the support structures needed for healthy recovery is absolutely vital this is one of the big things i learned at my time at u-turn you've got to create the community that place of safety and nurture and growth that they would never have had you're giving them their lost family and their lost years you know recovery at u-turn can take anywhere up to two to three years everything needs to be rewired you've got to learn how to work with money how to regulate your emotions how to communicate when you're upset and what healthy relationships looks like how to put boundaries in place time keeping and then of course being responsible you know everything that well adjusted successful adults got as kids has to be retaught and relearned and it can only be done in community and it takes time so change is almost impossible to do by yourself and that's where the christian church can come in we can open up our homes and our facilities to help that change we we want to bring people into our communities and to show them love and to be the practical hands and eyes and help and moms and dads and brothers and sisters that many drug addicts would would never have had but then you come to christ but it's not a magic wand you don't automatically get all these things given back into your life there's there's a whole host of stuff that have to happen but you you start that process of change and and here here the battle starts this is where the fighting begins because you've got to fight it off again and again you've got to get strong in your fight against addiction but it's the same for the christian we've got to get strong in our fight against sin and how do we do that it's a daily battle and here's where bible reading and prayer and the truth of scripture becomes so important coming again in that section of romans that we've been looking at it says this those who are led by the spirit of god are the children of god the spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again rather the spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship and by him we cry abba father the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are god's children now if we are children then we are heirs heirs of god and co-heirs with christ if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory you know if you sow a thought and you reap an act you sow an act and you reap a habit you sow a habit and you reap a character and you sow a character and you reap a destiny well here our destiny is not to be controlled by the things of this world by our desires inside we're not our destiny is not to be controlled by plants you know marijuana is just a plant if you think about it it's not to be controlled by little bits of white chemicals or by fluid that we stick into our mouths alcohol we're not to be those slaves we are to be free and to be in control of our destiny but really to be controlled by god and to be controlled by christ and then when we are when

we put ourselves when we humble ourselves and put ourselves under his authority he he takes us he lifts us up he stops making us slaves he says okay you're my son now come and enjoy everything that i've got to offer you remember jesus says i've come to give life and give it to the full so let's remember that there is hope for addiction as there is for sin and christians we're no different from the addict at this point we we all battle with sin we all need the same help we all need the same hope our savior jesus christ there is hope and it's found in him well let's pray and ask him for help now heavenly father thank you for the promise of the gospel that in jesus christ you can deal with all the badness in our past you take away our sinful nature you take away our guilt the things that we've done and you make it possible for us to change by giving us a new heart and by giving us your spirit and reminding us a new identity and reminding us of that new identity in christ lord help us to live in the freedom and the victory and the promise and the hope of the gospel and of jesus christ our lord amen pers Treatment from C pint Tag and the gift there isist we contact a new Heart ■■ being in your heart and the hope and the Sebastian is allowed to join the path of beauty that i am believing that ■■■■ nation that proceeds to one again end again we also want employees to all of our friends and the meal signs that have traditional fathers as family signs of storm change will take every one of the combinaciones services that have changed