

What Does the Bible Teach About Christians and Drug Addiction?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

A. Prov. 14:12

1. One person described her addiction this way: "It was the best thing in my life until it became the worst thing in my life."
2. Most Christians believe that the drug is the problem. It is not the problem, but rather than the means of facilitating the problem.
3. The addiction is the real issue. We are meant to worship God and God alone, and instead have allowed something else to take His place.
4. The word addiction is from the Latin word addictus, which means "to surrender to the gods; to devote, sacrifice, betray, or abandon." (Sharon Hersh, The Last Addiction)
5. The habit becomes one's worship, and the substance becomes the idol.
6. "An addiction is any pleasure that becomes an obsession (a mental preoccupation) which often then results in a compulsion (a behavior that acts out the obsession). Addictions can be chemically based, but they can also be emotionally or behaviorally based as well. An addiction is not a disease. You can't catch an addiction. An addiction is a sinful disorder which therefore stresses responsibility for your addiction, but also gives hope for recovery from your addiction. An addiction is anything we depend on that draws us away from giving greater dependence on God. An addiction is not trusting in the sufficiency of Christ. An addiction is a false god. An addiction is an idol." (Randy Smith, Overcoming Addictions)

B. Addictions take multiple forms (the list is not comprehensive):

1. Hobbies, Smart phones, Social media, Texting, Television, Entertainment, Video games, Drugs, Alcohol, Sugar, Chocolate, Eating, Caffeine, Nicotine, Athletics, Exercise, Shopping, Politics, Pornography, Gambling, Money, Work, etc.

I. THE PROBLEM OF ADDICTION

A. The cost to society

1. The annual cost of drug abuse is over \$100 billion. It costs every US taxpayer more than \$700 per year.
2. 70,630 Americans died from drug-involved overdose in 2019, including illicit drugs and prescription opioids, 68% men, 32% women.
3. Drug overdose deaths involving prescription opioids rose from 3,442 in 1999 to 17,029 in 2017. (CDC)
 - a. The pharmaceutical companies have cynically structured a profiteering scheme that makes money at both ends of this issue. First, they manufacture prescription opioids at an incredible rate and distribute them to pill vending doctors with little or no oversight. When caught and fined, the companies factor the fine into their overhead costs without changing policy or production.

Then, they develop and manufacture methadone and narcan to treat opioid addiction and overdose. So, they make the addicting drugs, and they make the drugs to treat the addiction. They create the problem so that they can profit from the solution.
(Summary of Frontline episode: "Opioids, Inc." June 23, 2020)

B. The cost to families

1. 2004 report by Robert Perkinson: "There is not a family in America that has not been impacted by addiction in one form or another."
2. A family is a system, and when the system runs properly it is a beautiful thing. Members have a safe place to come home, they love and support each other, and everyone does their part.
3. Addiction breaks down the system and adds to the burden of responsibility of other members of the family.
 - a. Home is no longer a safe place; family is focused on surviving
 - b. Children have to take on the responsibilities of their parents
 - c. Families learn to live with deception and denial and develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that crop up in other areas of life.
4. The children usually suffer the most. They don't understand why mom or dad isn't there for them. They don't understand why their parents continue to do something so damaging to themselves and to the home.
5. Children in addicted households usually experience greater levels of anger or abuse than those in other households.
 - a. Often, babies are born already physically dependent on a drug.
6. Most families struggling with addiction eventually come apart. So there is the added cost of divorce or separation, which increases the family's pain, as well as the cost to society.

C. The cost to the soul - Prov. 23:19-21; 1Cor. 6:9-10

II. QUESTIONS THAT DETERMINE IF ONE IS ADDICTED

- A. Is there anything that you believe you "really need?" (apart from food, clothing, and shelter)
- B. Is there anything that you could not imagine losing for a few weeks?
- C. Do you plan your life around the ability to get or use something?
- D. Is there any behavior, habit, unhealthy desire or self-destructive behavior that you can't stop?
- E. Are other areas of your life suffering (family, friends, career, finances, health) because of a certain behavior?
- F. Is a certain behavior preventing you from growing in Christ?
- G. Do thoughts of a certain item, action, or person consume you and bring more pleasure than thoughts about God?
- H. Is there anything that is wasting your money and time?
- I. Is there anything in your life that you keep hidden from others?
- J. Is there anything in your life that leaves you anxious, guilty or empty, but yet you still desire more of it?
- K. Is there anything that you feel controls your life?

- L. When depressed, scared, bored, stressed, or irritable, where is the first place or the first thing to which you turn?
- M. What or whom do you trust for comfort, protection, adventure, satisfaction, purpose, and pleasure?

III. UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF ADDICTION

A. Pain - Prov. 18:14, 31:6-7

1. Addiction often begins with hurt: loneliness, guilt, shame, pain, depression, fear.
2. God offers a means of bearing with all of these matters, but humankind often chooses to go to a source of comfort of their own choosing
 - a. 1Cor. 10:13; 2Peter 2:9
3. These are very real problems that need to be addressed, and it is the ignorant or self-righteous who say, "Just get over it; don't you know that you are supposed to rejoice in the Lord."
4. It is no more effective to tell someone suffering with depression to "just get over it," than it would be to tell a diabetic, "just trust God for healing and stop taking insulin."
5. Emotional disorders are real issues that require treatment, but as with every treatment for every illness in this world, we begin the process of healing by going first to the Lord, and keep Him involved in the treatment process until the end.

B. Avoidance - James 1:13-14

1. The substance becomes the means by which the person in pain attempts to escape the problem.
 - a. In the children's book *The Little Prince*, the Prince asks a character called the Tippler, "Why do you drink?" The Tippler responds, "Because I feel guilty." The Prince then asks, "Why do you feel guilty?" The Tippler responds: "Because I drink."
2. Some folks cannot bear the emotional pain, so they seek escape in addiction to something else.
 - a. In the beginning, it numbs the pain and distracts the mind.
 - b. Over time, it takes over the mind and generates a new form of suffering, often greater and always more harmful and difficult to overcome than the original problem
 - c. Eventually, the addict despairs of ever breaking the cycle, but there is hope. Others have broken the cycle, and they can too. But they must first understand what it is they are avoiding and address it directly.

C. Deceit/denial - Jer. 17:9

1. The user becomes expert at hiding the addiction. He hides it because he is afraid it will be taken away from him if it is discovered.
2. So he lies, deceives, manipulates, and blames, and in the process loses all integrity and true sense of self.
3. Addicts are master manipulators. When confronting them with their addiction, one will often hear an unending stream of deflection and

excuses expertly designed to prevent others from taking away their idol. They may even verbally attack those who ask.

4. Common excuses:

- “One drink isn’t going to hurt.”
- “I just need a little something to relax me.”
- “I’ve worked hard and I deserve this.”
- “I can handle it.”
- “It’s not that big a deal.”
- “This will be the last time.”
- “I can stop anytime I want.”
- “I can’t stop anyway, so why even try?”

5. Even chemical dependency is a lie. It is a physical lie. It is the body telling one that he will die if he doesn’t continue with the addictive substance. It’s not true. They will go through withdrawal, and they will need a doctor’s care, but it is very unlikely that they will die.

D. Enslavement

1. “Physical addiction occurs when you repeatedly satisfy a natural appetite and desire with a temporary pleasure until you become the servant of the temporary object of pleasure rather than its master.” (Mark Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*)
2. Dopamine receptors and rewiring the brain
3. Gen. 4:7; Rom. 6:16; Prov. 23:29-35

IV. OVERCOMING ADDICTION

A. God knows and loves us - Heb. 4:13; Rom. 5:8

1. God knows our every secret, and He loves us in spite of it
2. We don’t have to clean ourselves in order to come to God; we come to God in order to clean ourselves.

B. At the center of this issue is a spiritual battle - Eph. 6:12; 1Peter 5:8

1. No wonder we become overwhelmed. All of the spiritual forces of evil are aligned for our destruction.
2. The Adversary wants to use our addictions against us

C. There is hope in God - Psalm 25:3; John 10:10; 1Cor. 6:11

1. Many addicts have lost hope. They have tried and failed to kick the habit so many times, they think there is no way out.
2. Just as Satan wants our destruction; Jesus wants our redemption.
3. If the Corinthians can change, anyone can.

D. We need God’s help - Rom. 7:22-25; Matt. 6:24

1. We need to admit our need for His help - Psalm 119:133
2. We must trust the help He gives - 1Cor. 6:12, 10:13
3. You are not the only person who has struggled with addiction, with God’s help every addiction can be overcome, and God has equipped you to bear with the temptation and the consequences of overcoming it.

E. We need honorable influences - 1Cor. 15:33; Heb. 3:13, 10:24

1. We need to surround ourselves with good folks who will encourage us, and hold us accountable, and help us to make good decisions.

2. That is why the Lord put Christians together in local churches
- F. We must confess the truth - John 8:31-36; 1John 1:8-9
1. Lies bring slavery; the truth brings freedom.
 2. Truth begins with confession.
- G. We need to view ourselves as dead to sin but alive to God - Rom. 6:11-13
1. One must make a complete break with the past, and consider himself dead to sin and the old way of life.
 2. In other words, there is no going back. Don't comfort it, don't coddle it, don't entertain notions that we can somehow co-exist in the future.
 3. The second part is essential. If we only count ourselves dead to sin, we will always be missing the addiction, longing for it, wanting to back to it.
 4. When we count ourselves alive to God, we replace the addiction with something healthier, sustainable, and ultimately and infinitely satisfying.
- H. We must grow in the fruit of the Spirit - Gal. 5:22-23
1. Especially self-control - Eph. 5:18
 2. Fill up our lives with healthy, spiritual things, and the things of this world will lose their power over us. Illustration: Ulysses Vs. Jason

In the mythological story of Ulysses, the story is told of his encounter with the Sirens. Uncountable, unwitting sailors who, on passing by their island, succumbed to the outward beauty of the Sirens and their seductively irresistible songs. Once lured close to the shore, their boats crashed on the hidden rocks lurking beneath the surface of the sea. The demonic cannibals whose alluring disguise and mesmerizing melodies had drawn them close wasted little time in savagely consuming their flesh.

Ulysses was warned about the Sirens, so when approaching their island, he ordered his crew to tie him to the mast of the ship and put wax in their ears. "I want to hear the song," said the foolish leader. "No matter what I say or do. Don't untie me until we are safely at a distance from the island." As the ship passed by, Ulysses inwardly wanted to pursue the Sirens, but outwardly the ropes prevented his indulgence.

This is how many well-meaning believers seek to get through the Christian life. In their battle against sin, they are living in guilt, frustration, despair and hopelessness, hanging on by their fingernails, hoping to persevere through the Christian life. Is this how God really wants us to live? Obeying like Ulysses only because we are shackled by external restraints? Obeying not because it is the glad product of a transformed heart, but because we are motivated by fear and shame? Does external obedience bring us joy when our heart wants just the opposite? Does this bring God glory?

Jason, like Ulysses, was himself a character of ancient mythology. Like Ulysses, Jason also faced the Sirens, but he brought a different solution to the problem. Jason brought with him Orpheus whose musical ability surpassed the song of the Sirens. As the ship passed by the Sirens, Orpheus played his beautiful sound, and the Sirens had no influence on Jason.

Conclusion: Addiction is a serious problem that adversely impacts churches, society, families, and individuals. There is no quick fix to the problem. It will take time and determination, but with God's help and by applying these principles from God's Word to the matter, we can overcome it.