

Whatever your views are on “casual” drinking or taking drugs, the Bible is clear, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (*Ephesians 5:18*) It seems that, in the very least, we are not to be controlled by anything but the Holy Spirit. Although true, this doesn’t provide easy answers about getting a life back on track once it is entrenched in a lifestyle of addiction.

The painful consequences addictions cause to family members and friends, not to mention the physical abuse to an individual’s own body, are just some of the reasons to seek help. The most important reason is the barrier these addictions place between us and God. These barriers ultimately affect every aspect in a person’s life.

Some Keys to Recovery

Paul warns us about what happens when we let fruitless activities control our lives. “For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” (*Ephesians 5:8-11*) It appears that two important keys to recovery involve: (1) taking the time and energy to discover what will please the Lord and then (2) exposing the secrets that exist in your life. Paul ends this section of scripture with the command to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (*Ephesians 5:21*) Sounds like accountability and honesty are necessary components to freedom as well!

Often those who struggle with addictions are merely following the model for coping with problems that they learned as a child. They may also use controlled substances to anesthetize the lies they believe about themselves. Perhaps they grew up being told that they were a failure by experiencing curses from others. Maybe nothing ever seemed good enough for one or both parents. The child, now an adult, struggles with lies of invalidation, thinking “I’m unloved or unneeded.” Sometimes, on the opposite extreme, a parent may not allow a child to fail at all. They do everything they can for the child or make excuses for the child’s mistakes. As this child grows up, he or she can become overwhelmed and incapacitated by the thought of making mistakes or decisions. In effect, a mistake can then trigger the lie-based feelings of shame for not being perfect. Unfortunately, these individuals never learned that mistakes are a natural part of life.

Look around on a Sunday morning at church. You can be sure that at least a handful of people you see are dealing with serious addictive behaviors. “They have problems they don’t want to share with others and they strive to protect their reputations at

church.” “This is the ugly side of pride. Pride robs them and their families of help during times of need.”

Jesus himself declared that secrets don’t remain secrets for long, “For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light.” (*Mark 4:22*) To think otherwise is dangerous and opening yourself up for a fall. “To live a lie is to play right into the hands of the devil. He is the father of lies and the prince of darkness. Truth is not an enemy; it is always a liberating friend. No matter how painful it is initially to face the truth, the consequences will always be infinitely better than the consequences of living a lie.”

Facing the Facts

If you or a loved one is struggling with addictions, consider these first steps in finding recovery:

- Face the pains and disappointments of childhood through inner-healing prayer by taking the pain to Jesus.
- Face the truth of what your addiction has caused in your life and the lives of those around you—feeling “appropriate” guilt.
- It’s imperative that you share your “secret story” with those close to you and seek relationships of accountability and counsel.
- Recognize you are not perfect and never will be. Thankfully, the “Cross” removes the guilt of being imperfect. Accept that any remaining shame is based on lies.

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If you’re a Christian seeking help for substance abuse, you may wonder what other Christians or even God may think of you. The truth is that God is already aware of your struggles and He’s the one who calls us to live in the “light.” Bringing your addiction into that light is actually a very courageous and godly response. It is also helpful to remember that while not everyone experiences the same temptations, everyone *is* tempted and needs the healing grace of Jesus.

Sound Familiar?

If you’re wondering if you know anyone with a substance abuse problem, ask yourself if any of these statements are familiar:

- “If I were a better spouse, maybe he wouldn’t drink so much.”
- “I don’t want to talk about my drinking. Talking about it just puts added pressure on me and makes things worse.”
- “I’ll just call in sick for her in the morning. Maybe next time she’ll have learned not to drink so much.”
- “If you didn’t nag me, I wouldn’t have to drink so much.”
- “I needed a few drinks to relax. Guess I overdid it a bit.”

“Substance Abuse” continued...

- “He does seem to drink an awful lot, but I should mind my own business and not discuss it with him.”
- “If we pick up the slack for him at work, maybe it’ll take the pressure off so he can deal with his drinking problem.”

These statements reflect denial. Getting past this stage requires confronting the problem with truth and committing to do what it takes to resolve it. We must examine the way we respond to the “Life Issues” our fellow church members are experiencing. Examine how **you** might respond to a friend struggling with addictions. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and tenderness which invites healing.

Creating an Environment for Healing

Jeff VanVonderen, in his book, *“Good News for the Chemically Dependent,”*⁴ suggests there are three basic needs we all possess:

- 1) We need to believe that we are loved and accepted, without strings (becoming free from lies of invalidation).
- 2) We need to believe that we are capable, valuable, important, special and worthy.
- 3) We need to believe that we are not alone (becoming free from abandonment lies).

He believes that “the primary purpose of families and churches is to convince their members of these things.”⁵ This “convincing” is done by entering into healing prayer which leads to experiencing Christ’s truth and His unconditional love. It is these truths that a chemically-dependent person must experience to find healing. Simply telling them to stop drinking or that taking

drugs is sinful will never be enough. Instead, we must demonstrate tough love by not accepting the irresponsible behavior, forcing the abuser to deal with the consequences. We must do this in a manner which is centered on loving acceptance and commitment. This is the first step in truly caring for this friend or family member.

Unfortunately, the opposite of this response tends to be the case. “A ‘do not talk’ rule develops which says that it is not acceptable to talk about how family members feel, what they see, and how they are being affected. Talking within the family, to the neighbors, with the relatives, or with church members is never allowed.”⁶ In the end, this creates an environment where healing cannot take place. Instead, emotions and anger build up and lead to physical and emotional damage to everyone involved.

Where to Go from Here

As a first step in recovery, come to the “*Celebrate Recovery*” evening service on Sunday, March 2 at 7:30 p.m. We pray you have the courage to take the necessary steps for freedom from addictions and we look forward to encouraging you along the way.

CEFC Resources

- **“Celebrate Recovery” Focus Group**
Jane Zercher, Care Ministries, 763-971-5119
- **Freedom Ministry and Theophostic Ministry**
Katherine Bentley, Care Ministries, 763-971-5123
- **Assessment and Referral Counseling**
Katherine Bentley, Care Ministries, 763-971-5123

^{1,2,3}*Freedom from Addiction*; Neil T. Anderson, and Mike and Julia Quarles; ©1996 Regal Books; pg. 220.

^{4,5}*Good News for the Chemically Dependent*; Jeffrey VanVonderen; ©1985 Thomas Nelson Publishers; pgs. 78-80.

⁶*Good News for the Chemically Dependent*; Jeffrey VanVonderen; ©1985 Thomas Nelson Publishers; pg. 57. 