

## RECOGNIZING AND FACING ADDICTIONS

(Understanding compulsions in lives as it relates to counseling)

### Introduction:

Because of space we will of necessity be very brief in this presentation. In the past, the term "addiction" has had a very limited focus, being associated almost entirely with alcohol and other drugs. In fact, there are many kinds of addictions, such as-- **food addicts, addictive gamblers, sex addicts, shoplifters, workaholics, addictive spenders, romance addicts, a relationship addiction, a power addiction, etc.** Millions of addicts have never used mind altering drugs, but none the less are addicted and in their rituals they seek highs from their brand of addition.

There are many who struggle under some addiction, and live lives of emotional isolation, shame and despair which is caused by the tyranny of their addiction. Addiction has been described as a moral weakness, a lack of will power, an inability to face the world, a spiritual illness and some even call it a sickness.

A basic assumption is that all human beings have a deep desire to feel happy and to find peace of mind and soul. At times in our lives, most all of us find this wholeness of peace and beauty, but then it's as if it slips away for some and is gone. (I am speaking of the potential in the lives of saved and possibly lost people as well.) When it leaves us, we feel a slight sense of sadness and even a slight sense of mourning. In many ways, this is one of the natural cycles of life. It's not a cycle that we can control.

We all tend to want to do things that are rewarding and positive, and we tend to avoid things that are negative and aversive. If it hurts, we try to stop the pain. If it feels good, we want to do it again. If the conditions of the Garden of Eden were still in effect, there would be no addiction. The reason? Because there would be continual contentment and no beginning of pain.

But we live in a world where there are cycles of feelings. We desire to feel happy and to experience peace of mind. Sometimes we are able to experience pleasure, but it can't last forever. The good feelings seem to slip away. When they leave, we may grieve, feel sad, or become depressed over the loss. It is inevitable that we will lose a

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loved one, suffer a loss of status, have a dream or ideal shattered, experience an end of a friendship, have various kinds of losses and feel that our prayers are not answered. These are the times when a person is susceptible to forming an addictive relationship. (Often, for a Christian it is because of spiritual weakness, lack of a vital walk with the Lord, and probably having little if any outside support. The person probably also have a number of strongholds of sin already in the life from the past life style.)

## I. THE ADDICT SEEKS AFTER A MOOD CHANGE.

Addiction can be viewed in part as an attempt to control these various uncontrollable cycles. When addicts engage in a particular object or event to produce a **desired mood change, they emotionally believe they can control these cycles.** Addiction, on its most basic level, is an attempt to control and fulfill this desire. It becomes a process that must viewed as progressive.

It must be seen as a continuous development from a definite, though often unclear, beginning toward an end point.

Compare it with cancer. What all cancers share is a similar process--the uncontrolled multiplying of cells. We must understand what all addictions and the process of all addictions have in common: the out of control and aimless searching for wholeness, happiness, fulfillment and peace through a relationship with an object or an event. The addict is trying to produce a desired mood change through that which becomes his or her addiction.

- > The **alcoholic** experiences a mood change having drinks at the neighborhood saloon.
- > The **food addict** experiences a mood change binging or starving.
- > The **addictive gambler** experiences a mood change by placing bets on football games and then watching the action on television.
- > The **shoplifter** experiences a mood change by stealing clothes from a department store.
- > A **sex addict** experiences a mood change browsing in a pornographic bookstore, hunting for a prostitute or some other sexual adventure. The person expects to be dizzy with delight.
- > The **addictive spender** experiences a mood change by going on a shopping spree.

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- > The **workaholic experiences** a mood change by staying at work to accomplish another task even though he or she is needed at home.
- > The **relationship addict** must seemingly keep the relationship even when it means beatings, and abuse, both physical and mental.
- > The **power addict** wants to control people. Prestige, honor, acclaim, status, control, and influence are strong compelling drives. The power addict expects to be greater than life, to manipulate and to achieve through control that which is his or her fantasy. Pastors also are vulnerable to this power addiction, but seldom see it.

### II. THE ADDICT SEEKS TO "ACT OUT" THEIR ADDICTION.

Acting out is when an addict engages in addictive behaviors or addictive mental obsessions. Of course, in most cases, they are literally more and more captivated by sin, by its enticement, and by their own self imposed and chosen addiction--which then becomes an addictive behavior.

Here are some examples:

- > The **sex addict** cruises a section of town where he is more likely to find prostitutes, or pornography shops or some other fulfilled vice. He does so with excitement and anticipation.
- > The **addictive gambler** studies a racing form, with personal excitement building up inwardly, with anticipated fulfillments.
- > The **addictive overeaters** think about going to different stores to buy food possibly believing that clerks are starting to think badly of them for their eating desires. And yet they can't wait until they experience the "high" they feel from eating as much as they want.
- > The **addictive spenders** make the latest purchase expecting from it to have a new high, and to feel great because of that purchase.
- > The **power addict** uses every means possible to control things to bring about the desired ends which will bring great personal acclaim and honor.
- > In the **relationship addiction** the wife feels that she can change the husband to be, although he is cruel, and abusive. She feels compelled to marry him even though her better wisdom would guide otherwise.

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For the addict, acting out is a way to create certain feelings that cause an emotional and mental shift within the person. The angry person by going to have a drink expects to create a better mood or to get away from the thing or person whom they feel has caused the bad feeling.

By acting out either through thoughts or actual behavior the addict learns to create feelings of being relaxed, excited, or being in control. The addict can also create feelings of fear, self-disgust, shame and self-hate. Most of all, the addict achieves an illusion of being in control though acting out.

1. Acting out becomes an attempt to make emotional sense out of life.
2. Addicts emotionally believe they are being fulfilled through their actions.
3. The high created by addictive acting out is often described by addicts as a time in which they feel alive and complete. (This is especially true in the early stages of the addiction process. Later they are most apt to hate the thing they are engaged in, but feel trapped.)

### **III. THE ADDICT SEEKS CONTROL--BUT EXPERIENCES BONDAGE.**

Addiction is a process for it seldom remains constant. As it changes, it usually takes more and more of the person's energy and resources, to the point that it can become destructive and even fatal. As the addiction continues and grows it becomes a way of life, a life style that is very hard to break. There are common patterns in this process. (Of course, many addicts we may meet in life are unsaved, and not sure that they are even in any bondage.) Many whom we may win to Christ are still in their addictive patterns and behavior when they accept Christ. They need to be set free.

Going back to the subject of wanting to control the cycles of life which bring an unsettled feeling--the addict tries to control these uncontrollable events. When he engages in a particular object or event to produce a desired mood change, he believes he can control the cycle. The addict believes he can make the pain go away and bring about good feelings whenever he wants. But it all becomes like a cancer which eventually involves the uncontrolled multiplying of harmful cells. The addiction is an out-of-control search for happiness or the avoidance of pain. Regardless of the addiction, every addict has a relationship with an object or event in order to produce a mood change.

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By acting out in either thought or action, the addict attempts to create feelings of excitement, fantasy, or relaxation. The change in mood resulting from the acting out gives the addict the illusion of being in control. The process continues as the addict attempts to make sense out of life. They believe they are being fulfilled by their behavior. As they seek to escape pain or hurt, the process is reinforced. As the addictive cycle continues, the process is reinforced and the person is soon in bondage. More and more they are creating inward guilt and shame, always hoping to quit doing as they do, but never finding a way to be set free. By and by they feel that

they are actually nurtured by their addiction. Another outcome is that they avoid responsibility and deny reality. As a result the addict also learns to trust things more than people. The promise of power and of a mood change that feels good continues to hold the person in the face of helplessness.

### **IV. THE ADDICT SEEKS NURTURING--BUT IS SEDUCED BY THE ADDICTION.**

As the addict continues to engage in the behavior, a very seductive thing happens. The addict begins to believe that he or she can be nurtured by objects or events. This happens because in acting out, (whether relaxing, thrill seeking, or fantasy) it allows the addict to get temporary relief from the pain, pressures and unhappiness of life. This is all a very short term gain. (We have all at times avoided dealing with some of life's unpleasantness in different hurtful ways.)

1. Compulsive behavior is best understood as an individual's self-defeating adjustment to his environment.
2. It represents an habitual style of coping.
3. The person becomes locked into a fixed pattern of behavior from which there seems to be no escape.
4. The addict is hoping to get needs met by developing a relationship with an object, experience or event.
5. The addict with this kind of singular purpose tends to withdraw and isolate from people.
6. For the addict it all becomes a life style and the person loses control and becomes enmeshed into a habitual avoidance of reality.
7. Life takes on a singular focus--the pursuit of the addiction. This is part of the insanity of the addictive process.

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## V. THE ADDICT SEEKS GOOD--BUT IS ENMESHED IN ADDICTIVE THINKING.

What we believe is very important. Beliefs do determine action. Beliefs are like road maps, signs and laws of the highway. They tell us where to go, how to get there, and how we should behave on the way. Our beliefs have a direct bearing on what we do (Prov. 23:7). Our actions follow from what we believe to be true. The feelings and actions of the addict are affected by certain beliefs about events and circumstances. Many of these beliefs are not true, but they are held to tenaciously, because the addict knows no other way. He seeks good, but is enmeshed in addictive thinking.

### Examples:

1. On a logical level, addicts know that an object or event cannot bring emotional fulfillment, but their thinking is not logical.
2. Alcoholics know they can't escape into a bottle.
3. Addictive spenders know that money can't buy happiness.
4. In relational addiction the person knows they can't actually change the other person, but they will hold on to the relationship even in the midst of beatings, abuse, and continued hurts of many kinds.
5. When a sex addict feels depressed, he rents an x-rated video, and feels better for a short period of time. Since the good feeling does not last he probably will feel guilty and remorseful the next morning.

The thinking of an addict is divided. Part of the sex addict's thinking says that the movie would take his mind off of his problems. Another part reminded him of his promise to his wife not to view this material again. He wants the stimulation of the movie, so he finally gives in to the emotional logic that says the mood-altering experience will make him feel better. He will feel better, and he wants that feeling now.

## VI. THE ADDICT SEEKS CONTROL-- BUT LOSES CONTROL

**There are three stages to the addiction process.**

### A. *The First Stage Involves Internal Changes.*

The personality begins to change as a result of the intoxicating experiences. This ***euphoric experience*** teaches the prospective addict that one's feelings can change through a relationship with an object or event.

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This intense feeling, unfortunately, gets mistaken for intimacy, nurturing, and a sense of personal power.

This cycle causes an emotional craving that results in mental *preoccupation*. Instead of reaching out to family, friends, and church, etc., for help, the *person reaches out to the mood-altering experience*. The more ingrained the cycle, the greater the preoccupation and dependency.

It is also easy for the addict to switch objects of addiction. The bottom line for the recovering addict is to understand that the addictive personality will stay with him for life. At some level, his personality will always be looking for an object or experience to give him the illusion of nurturing. *The person's belief system will influence whether he will continue to return to an experience that is progressively damaging.*

### ***B. In The Second Stage the Person Becomes Out of Control.***

This lack of control is seen on a behavior level. The episodes of being ***behaviorally out of control*** become more frequent. The addict becomes more preoccupied with the object or event that has become their obsession. At this stage *others start to notice* something is wrong. Coworkers, family, and friends begin to see the presence of an addictive personality.

- > In stage one the person usually ***acts within socially acceptable limits***.
- > In stage two the addicts ***starts to act out the belief system*** in a ritualistic manner and the behavior is more out of control.
- > The person becomes ***dependent upon the addictive personality***, not just the mood change or the object or event.
- > The addictive belief system ***develops into a lifestyle***.
- > The addict ***lies*** when it would be easier to tell the truth.
- > The person ***blames others***, knowing that it is not true.
- > ***Behavior becomes ritualized***. (Healthy rituals serve to bind us to family and friends. Addictive rituals serve to isolate the addict from others.)
- > The person ***withdraws from others***.
- > When the addict acts out and then explains it away, ***he deepens his commitment to addiction***.

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- > Because the addict must make emotional sense to his or herself out of the inappropriate behavior the person turns to **denial, repression, lies, rationalization**, and other defense to cope with what is happening.
- > The person becomes more and more **isolated** from others, which in turns creates loneliness, which in turn causes him to turn to his addiction to feel better. It becomes a vicious cycle serving to strengthen the addictive process.
- > In this stage the person **surrenders** to the immense power of addiction. The person struggles with the desire to act out and the possibility of getting into trouble. Soon the stress of such a surrender limits a normal life.
- > **Energy** once directed toward family, friends, and self-care **is now used to sustain the addiction.**
- > Often with all of this is a **self-filling prophecy**. As negative labels are applied to the addict the person finds more freedom to act irresponsibly. "Since people think I am a bum, I might as well be"--becomes the thought. "I'm a fat slob, so why not go ahead and eat. Nobody cares about me anyway"--can become a thought or statement.
- > The final characteristic of stage two is **spiritual deadening**. Connections with God, church, community, and fellowships become dull and meaningless. The soul seems bereft of any sense of God's presence and the person has little appetite for Scriptures, sermons, discussion and/ or prayer.

### C. **By Third Stage Three the Addictive Personality is In Total Control.**

At this point the addict's life will start to break down under the tremendous stress caused by the increased pain, anger and fear which results from continuously acting out.

The one thing of importance to the addict is to maintain the ability to achieve a *high* from the acting out. The person becomes totally preoccupied with those things that will help maintain the addictive lifestyle. Nothing else matters.

- > The person's emotions start to break down.
- > The person may cry uncontrollably for the slightest reason, go into angry outrages or tantrums for seemingly no reason.
- > Free-floating anxiety, panic attacks and hysteria can strike and last for a few moments to several days.
- > Largely the addict can no longer manipulate people for his ends, he loses his effectiveness in this. *Family and friends are fed up* and many will abandon the



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- addict. There is a feeling that the whole world is against him.
- > The addict at this point *may threaten suicide* or other consequences if his family or friends do not help.
  - > *Difficult circumstances abound at this point.* The addict's work is endangered, marriages are threatened or ended, financial problems are overwhelming or legal problems emerge. Physical problems also occur. Many illness and problems are attributed to the breakdown and the sinful life style of the addict.
  - > The *physical damage* resulting from addiction is enormous, both for the addict and for his family and friends. Suicide is a common consideration at this point. Depression, anger, rage, guilt, shame, loneliness, and hopelessness can combine to make self-destruction look very inviting.

### VII. NOTE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ADDICTION AND NON-ADDICTION.

***Evaluate your favorite experiences in light of the following questions.***

1. Does the experience enhance your ability to live for God?
2. Does the experience help bond you to other people?
3. Does it help you to bear fruit that encourages and builds up others?
4. Does it enable you to work more effectively?
5. Does it encourage you to love more beautifully?
6. Does it bring you to a closer relationship with God?
7. Does it permit you to appreciate the world around you more?
8. Does it foster growth and expansion of ministry for the Lord?
9. Does it facilitate the experience of God-honoring joy and pleasure?
10. Does it allow you to make choices that please the Lord?
11. Does it allow you to control when you start and stop the activity?

**If an object or experience diminishes you, makes you less attractive for God, less capable, less sensitive, or limits, stifles, or harms, then it is addictive.**

An experience can be intensely absorbing without being addictive. Addiction is marked by an intensity of need in which a person pursues the sensual aspect of an

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experience, primarily for its intoxicating effects.

### VIII. NOTE SOME DIFFERENT KINDS OF ADDICTIONS

1. Some are involved in a **romance addiction**. They are in love with the idea of love. It becomes a compelling need to maintain an illusion of being in love.
2. Some are involved in a **relationship addiction**. They need the other person regardless of what is taking place.
3. Some are involved in a **sexual addiction**. They feel that sex is the most important need, and they are looking for constant sexual highs.
4. Others are involved in a **eating addiction**. It is a food addiction manifested as anorexic behavior or bulimic behavior.
5. Still others are involved in a **power addiction**. They must be in control. Exercising power over people, things and events is all consuming.
6. Some are involved in a **religious addiction**. God is not the important person, but self and experiences which one can have in religion.
7. Still others are entrapped in **activity addiction**. These possibly are workaholics and they derive great personal satisfaction from their personal drive and sacrifice. Or they are involved in exhilarating arousing activities which control them, such as thrill seeking, exercise addiction, or some other compulsions. (These seek an adrenaline high.)

**(A small book and more could be written about each of one of these.)**

### IX. CONSIDER SOME STEPS TO RECOVERY.

(In this we must be brief again because of the space and time.)

#### 1. **Recognize the Idolatry of it all.**

Admit that life has become unmanageable and that you are powerless over the effects of separation from God. (Romans 7:18). Acknowledge helplessness and recognition that help is needed. The compulsion of the addiction is a form of idolatry.

#### 2. **Recognize Only God Has the Answer.**

Believe that God can restore you to sanity. That we can come to Him through His Son, and know God personally and have a vital relationship with Him. (See John 3:3-67; Acts 16:31; John 1:11-12; Romans 3:9-12; 3:23; 6:23; 5:6,8; 10:9-13) We must affirm that we need to be saved from sin... it's penalty, power, and control

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over our lives. You must be born again by faith in Christ's shed blood.

### **3. Recognize You Must Make a Personal Decision.**

Make a decision to turn your will and your life over to God, yield to His Word and accept His plan for your life (Rom. 12:1,2; Eph. 5:17). We must come to the place of entrusting our lives to God. If we admit that we are powerless, separated from God and our lives are unmanageable in ourselves, (And we enter into step two.), then this is the natural outcome. (See Rev. 3:20; Psa 34:8.)

### **4. Recognize the Seriousness of Your Condition.**

Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself (Lam. 3:40). There must be a thorough examination of behavior and a journey into self-awareness of the programming, habits, patterns, and sinful self-talk lies that are a part of the whole picture. There must be a recognition of the wrong belief system which is an integral part of the whole situation.

We must begin to look at the dark side of our character, to identify and understand character weakness or defects (sins) and see how these have controlled our behavior. Denial has been the biggest enemy, but up to now has been the closest companion.

An inventory must be made, not a history, but an inventory which reveal the weakness we would rather not acknowledge.

Write down resentment, fears, guilt, shame, and a detailed account of compulsive acting out.

**Review your desires--thoughts--motives--actions in terms of the Seven Deadly Sins-- PRIDE, GREED, LUST, ANGER, GLUTTONY, ENVY, AND LAZINESS.**

### **5. Recognize the Exact Nature of Your Sin**

Admit to God, and to yourself, and to another human being the exact nature of our sins (James 5:16; Psa. 32:1-5; Psa. 51).

After identifying the character traits that led to our compulsive behavior, we can relieve the burden of the guilt and shame. This is done by admitting to ourselves and to another person our wickedness, and by confessing our sins to God. There must be a full confessing and a thorough repentance of the wrongs (I Jh 1:7-10; Isa. 55:7).

### **6. Recognize the Need to Be Free From the Bondage.**

Be entirely willing and ready for God to remove all these practices, these sin

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patterns and habits of life (James 4:10).

We must be confronted to change our habits, life-style and patterns of acting out. There must be a commitment to change. (See Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3: 5-14; Eph. 4:30-32.) Humbly (James 4: 6-10) ask God for a removal of these sinful patterns, and shortcomings. (I Jh 1:9) Allow God to bring a healing of damaged emotions, change the attitudes and transform the behavior (Rom. 12:2).

### **7. Recognize the Need of Make Restitution.**

Make a list of persons you have harmed, and be willing to make amends to them all. Restitution is very vital for ongoing change, and personal victory. (Luke 6:31) Prior to recovery the person blamed every one else for their problems. We have all at times done this and possibly also blamed God. We begin now to release our need to blame others and also accept full responsibility for personal actions. From point four (the inventory) we would be aware of all the sinful and inappropriate actions and sin which brought injury to others.

Along with this is the need for forgiveness. We must cancel the debt (Matt. 18:23-27; Eph. 4:32) and ask forgiveness from anyone whom we might have offended as well.

### **8. Recognize the Need of Being Reconciled to Others You Have Wronged.**

Make direct amends to such people wherever that is possible, except when to do so would injure them or others (Matt. 5: 23,24). After making the list we must actually fulfill the requirements to reconcile with others. We can procrastinate and find endless excuses, but amends must be made where possible (I Pet. 4:8-10; Matt. 18:15; Mark 11:24,25).

### **9. Recognize the Need to Daily Monitor Your Life.**

Continue to take personal daily inventory and, when you were wrong, promptly admit it (I Cor. 10:12; Psa. 139:23,24; Rom. 6:1-4; Gal. 6:1-5). Such a personal inventory is a daily examination of our strengths, and weaknesses, motives and behaviors. We need to monitor signs of attempting to manage our lives without God or of slipping into resentment, dishonesty, or selfishness. Also we must watch for rationalization about a gradual return to the former life style and sinful acting out.

### **10. Recognize the Need of a Daily Prayer Life.**

You must seek through prayer and meditation to improve your conscious contact with God as set forth in the Word of God. Pray for knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out (Col. 3:16a; 4:12).

There must be a deepening of the life with the Lord, a daily regimen of prayer

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and mediation which will give you day by day victory and reprieve from the past.

**Recovery must be relentlessly pursued on a daily basis.**

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we must take the message to others, practice the principles on a daily basis in all of life, and seek to win others to Christ (Gal. 6:1; II Cor. 5:17-21)

There must be an ongoing walk with the Lord in a positive way and with aggressive labor to help win others to the Lord and to see others set free from addictions.

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