

# Understanding and Overcoming Substance Abuse

*Posted by Pastor Del Wray*

First *Click* and answer these questions! [AM I AN ADDICT?](#)

All Scripture notations from the King James Bible (KJV)

Understanding and Overcoming Substance Abuse For anyone struggling with substance abuse or addiction, there is reason for great hope! God created us and gave us His Word, the Bible, with the essential keys for overcoming and spiritual growth. With that foundation and the strength that comes from God, plus professional advice and counseling, you can win the victory over substance abuse!

Judy Markley, a counselor in Oregon, tells this story:

"For the sake of confidentiality, John is not a real person, but a story representing most of my clients.

"Months after John graduated from nine months of alcohol and drug treatment with a renewed commitment to stay clean and sober; he was back in my office. John confessed he finally contacted his drug dealer after losing the battle against his urges. Because John has been a career criminal consumed by drug-related activities, he had lost his wife, friends and possessions and has not seen his children for 11 years. He has a broken heart. Ashamed and afraid, with two years of prison hanging over his head, still high from drinking and using meth the previous night, he tearfully begs for help...as he had done the first time.

"John's story is the story of addiction, a powerful force that strangles the best of intentions. John is both victim and self-saboteur, choosing to behave in ways he does not want."

What does the Bible say about wanting to do the right thing, yet choosing the wrong?

## **What Is Substance Abuse and What Does the Bible Say About It?**

Substance abuse is a broad term for addiction or inappropriate use of a chemical substance to alter one's mental, emotional or physical state, whether the substance is ingested orally, injected intravenously or inhaled. Abuse doesn't always involve or lead to addiction, while dependence is the therapeutic term that defines addiction. Substance abuse generally damages one's health, because the substances are often extremely toxic and dangerous.

In general, the Bible does not disapprove of moderate drinking of alcoholic beverages, but the Bible strongly condemns drunkenness 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:18; Isaiah 5:11. We also know by biblical principles that if a person has developed a dependence on alcohol, that person should commit to abstinence.

Because the Bible talks about wrong use of alcohol, it is logical to expand this to other mood-altering substances. The Bible does not specifically address the evils of drug use, but refers to "the lust of the flesh" as a description of out-of-control desire Galatians 5:16.

### **How do I know if I have an addiction?**

2 Peter 2:19, *"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."*

They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves to sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you.

Proverbs 15:22, *"Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."*

Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.

Illegal substances—like heroin, cocaine and methamphetamines—are extremely addictive. If any substance becomes so important that you are willing to break the law, risking legal consequences, you are becoming addicted. Realize that it is God who gives human governments the right to make and enforce laws, and He wants us to obey all laws that do not go against His laws Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13-14; Acts 5:29.

Narcotic-based medications are addictive. Use them only as prescribed. Communicate regularly with your doctor about your prescriptions and possible alternatives. Also many fumes or inhalants—such as solvents and aerosol sprays—and hallucinogens are very dangerous and addictive.

Checking with a professional alcohol and drug counselor to obtain an assessment can help answer the question of whether you are addicted. Some of the criteria considered include loss of control and failed attempts to quit; extreme amount of time and resources spent obtaining, using and recovering from the effects of use; ongoing use in spite of recurring problems; reduced lifestyle; significant withdrawal; and developed tolerance.

Another way to determine addiction is to attend Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous (AA or NA) to hear others' stories. AA also states that if your drinking is a problem to someone else, then you have a problem. Contacting AA or NA to obtain their literature may be one of the wisest things you have ever done.

Do you want addiction to rule your life? As a virtual tyrant, enslaving you, it will eventually destroy everything you love Romans 6:16. Because addiction magnifies covetousness, which the Bible likens to worshipping an idol, it is impossible to devote your life to God Colossians 3:5.

### **Now that I have admitted I have an addiction, how can I face others?**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, *“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”*

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

Your victory begins with being honest, open and willing to seek support from others. If you are addicted, people close to you have probably known it for a long time. They will breathe a sigh of relief because the defense of denial is finally broken. Opening up and listening are marks of humility 1 Peter 5:6-7.

Released from upholding the family lie that everything is okay, family members can start their own work of overcoming codependency. Codependents are consumed with the job of keeping life as normal as possible by covering up for the addict. By attending Al-Anon, a support group for relatives and friends, they can receive help to build normal lives.

I am so ashamed, even though I have apologized. How do I begin to feel better about myself?

2 Corinthians 7:10, *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Once addicts realize the enormity of their problem, they often become plagued with shame and guilt. Did you know there is a difference between shame and guilt? Shame promotes a sense of worthlessness, full of self-recriminations. Guilt, however, can help you acknowledge your bad choice, which is the first step toward godly sorrow and repentance. Guilt can provide motivation as it spotlights the outcome of your bad choice so you can make the opposite right choice.

Shame erodes your ability to accept support from a recovery community, putting you at a greater risk of relapse. You may find yourself triggered to self-medicate in an attempt to relieve internal discomfort, emotional pain and isolation. Try to remember, you are not addiction; you do addiction.

### **What is God's solution for shame?**

John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

God's love transcends all other love. Although difficult for us to understand, we must believe God's Word that He values us highly. When we repent of our sins, even in our darkest moments, God is eager to forgive us. If He did not love us and value us, why would He have allowed Christ to die an excruciating death for us? God loves us and wants us to have a life full of His blessings

Romans 8:32; 1 John 3:1. As the ultimate parent, God loves us as His children, making us heirs to His creation Romans 8:16-17. Prayer and godly repentance will open the way to finally accept and understand this.

### **How can I stop relapsing?**

John 16:24, *“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”*

Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Acts 3:19, *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;”*

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Let's define a relapse, as well as a lapse or a slip, terms used in recovery. These three levels are different based on the extent of use as well as recovery behaviors. A slip might be a few sips of beer or hits of marijuana; whereas a lapse could be a full beer or a full joint. However, a relapse might be a day of using drugs, getting drunk, going to the full extent of obtaining an effect. If you continue to abuse the substance until you are caught or hit bottom, you have resumed an addicted lifestyle.

Regardless of how you fall, you must repent. Repenting means changing YOUR MIND ABOUT GOD. Godly repentance includes realizing that our sins caused the death of Jesus Christ and asking God to forgive us. This requires a firm commitment to change. It is a process of asking God for strength and developing character to resist urges to use the substance. Repentance follows a change of heart, not just empty remorse and regrets.

Repentance is replacing the choices to act sinfully with the choices to do the right things Ezekiel 18:27-28. No one can overcome without being absolutely ready to stop wrong behaviors, which begins with an honest commitment to be absolutely done! Although the process may often be punctuated by successes and failures, when you continue to do your part, God will help you to avoid and escape temptations Matthew 6:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

### **But why do I keep relapsing?**

Jeremiah 17:9

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”*

Addiction is a great deceiver, falsely promising freedom from problems. Likewise, God says the human heart is deceitful. Could you be kidding yourself that you are doing all you can with your recovery tools and recovery activities? Are you truly working your program "with your might" Ecclesiastes 9:10? At that flash point of decision, do you cry out to God for strength to resist

making an addictive choice? Or do you yield to the pulls of your flesh Galatians 5:16? Honesty is the key to beginning true recovery.

Temptations to drink or use drugs are everywhere. What do I do?

John 17:15-16

*“I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”*

Jesus prayed this prayer the night before His crucifixion, thinking about what His followers through the ages would have to face in this evil age Galatians 1:4. Though we are in the world, we must not be of the world. Likewise, one must come out of the world of addiction to minimize and avoid temptations 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22. Avoid old environments, "friends" who are bad influences, even sights of drug paraphernalia. And pray to God every day for commitment, strength and wisdom to make right choices Philippians 4:13.

Recovery is more than not using or simply remaining abstinent. Recovery is rebuilding a better life by no longer choosing a self-destructive lifestyle. The choices involved in learning to live a healthy, normal life mean you pick up your recovery tools, work your 12-step program and develop a supportive social network. It also means exerting extreme effort to push away illegal drugs, to say no to drug dealers and to stop criminal thinking and behavior. If you immerse yourself in reading the Bible, strengthen yourself through prayer and run from all temptations, you will succeed!

### **How important is it for you to set goals for your life?**

Philippians 3:13-14, *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended [attained the goal of the resurrection and perfection, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

A major key to overcoming substance abuse or addiction is to keep your eyes on that goal of recovery! Paul certainly understood the necessity of being goal-oriented. If you "seek first the kingdom of God" Matthew 6:33 and align your other goals with this powerful vision, God will faithfully help you with all your goals. Stay focused and you will walk out of your addiction, one day at a time.

### **Can I still receive salvation if I relapse?**

1 John 1:8-9, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

You certainly can! When you fall down, God will help you get back up and go forward. All people who are trying to lead a godly life are faced with daily temptations to "relapse" into various sins. The apostle Paul—after having the gift of God's Spirit for many years—described how he still experienced this inner struggle Romans 7:14-25. Prone to make mistakes, humans can never earn salvation. Eternal life is God's gift, freely given by His grace Ephesians 2:8.

With God's power, we can gradually overcome the urges and cravings of addiction, so do not give up if you relapse. It doesn't mean you are not sincere about stopping. However, being in recovery does not give you permission to relapse, just as grace does not give you permission to sin (Romans 6:15; Jude 4). So when you lapse or relapse, confess it to God and ask His forgiveness. He will forgive. He will never leave you nor forsake you Hebrews 13:5. Be sure you never forsake Him! And never give up!

### **There Is Hope!**

Counselors see many people mired down in their own wreckage, completely devoid of hope. Yet given the chance to recover, these same people begin to see how addiction kept them from achieving their potentials and enjoying life. So, if you are addicted to substances, we pray you will commit yourself to a life of recovery and fulfill your great God-given potential!

### **The very existence of Christ in a life is the cure!**