

Unmasking Addiction

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Introduction: One Church's Journey

UMASKING ADDICTION SCIENTIFICALLY

A. Definition

The American Society of Addictive Medicine defines addiction as “a treatable, chronic medical *disease* involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences.” (emphasis mine)

B. Perceived Advantages of the Medical/Disease Model of Addiction

1. Seems to explain how addiction *feels*
2. Attempts to socially destigmatize addiction
3. Points to medical treatment as the solution
4. Permits financial/grant benefits for “scientific” research
5. Authorizes insurance payments for treatment facilities and practitioners

C. Dissenting Secular Views of Addiction

1. Stanton Peele (leading theorist, clinician, and writer in the field of addiction)—*The Meaning of Addiction: An Unconventional View, Addiction-Proof Your Child, and Outgrowing Addiction*
2. Arnold Ludwig (researcher and professor of psychiatry at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine)—*Understanding the Alcoholic’s Mind: The Nature of Craving and How to Control It*
3. Bruce Alexander (psychologist specializing in addiction research)—*The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of Spirit*
4. Marc Lewis (neuroscientist and developmental psychologist)—*The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction Is Not a Disease*

D. Disadvantages of the Medical/Disease Model of Addiction

1. Interpretations of scientific data are not universally accepted (as noted above).
2. The disease model removes hope since addiction is supposedly chronic and incurable
3. Successes cannot be explained medically.
 - a. More than half of addicts become sober on their own with no treatment.

- b. Eighty-five percent of addiction treatment centers and plans use AA-based (non-medical) treatment, which has only a 5-10% evidence-based success rate.
- 4. The disease model ignores the real problem—fallen people facing life on a fallen planet without a growing, Word-based relationship with Jesus Christ.

E. Scientific Take-Aways Interpreted Biblically

1. People desire and choose mood-altering experiences and substances when faced with challenges of life for which they do not have adequate personal resources or solutions.

Addictive substances and experiences become a temptation when facing the trials of life without personal relationship with and grace and wisdom from God.

2. The choices of the human heart are reinforced by the body—chemically and neurologically. Changes are expressed overtly primarily through the central nervous system and covertly primarily through the autonomic nervous system and the neurobiology of the brain.

God made the body to be a servant to the heart. Once wrongly “trained” by a misguided heart, the body has to be “untrained” and “retrained” by a renewed heart—one whose commitments, desires, and beliefs are molded by God through His Word and His Spirit.

3. These secular researchers have uncovered truths about the human experience that God has already addressed in His Word even more clearly, more profoundly, and more expansively. Believers never have to be afraid of science rightly interpreted. True science will never contradict the Bible.

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION THEOLOGICALLY

A biblical worldview provides the only accurate description of the nature of man’s soul and its problems, the goal of change, and the nature of the remedies to help the soul of man flourish through his trials.

A. Man is a created but fallen image-bearer of God.

Mankind fell when Adam and Eve chose to be influenced by someone who lied to them about God, about themselves, and about God’s ways. While the Fall did not obliterate the image of God in man, that image remains severely marred as Satan’s supreme act of vandalism against God’s image in His creation.

B. Man can flourish as his Creator intended only...

1. When he is reconciled to God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-6).
2. When he cultivates a daily, fruit-bearing relationship with His Savior (John 15:1-16).
3. When his mind is governed by God’s thoughts revealed to man in the Scriptures (Isa. 55:6-12; Rom. 8; 12:1-2).
4. When his emotions reflect that he desires the same things God desires for Himself and His creation (Rom. 15:1-13; Phil. 4:4-13).

- When his will makes choices that reflect a commitment to put God first in all things for God's glory and not his own (Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 6; Gal. 6:7-9; Col. 3:1-25).

Secular treatments can bring only temporary relief by altering moods and changing thought patterns. The above requirements are essential for soul-wellness—emotional and spiritual stability and flourishing. They are not optional.

C. Addiction is a “dependency disorder” (Jeremiah 2:13; Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 6).

- Ask yourself, “On whom do I depend to enable me to handle the setbacks of life and to provide a fulfilling and fruitful life—myself or God?”
- You are either turning to God and His ways or turning to yourself and your ways in every choice in life. Meditate upon the appeals of God to those turning away from Him in Isaiah 55.
- The “War on Drugs” to “just say no” will never be adequately helpful. You must join God in the war against your own sinful nature and “say no” to your fleshly desires and deceptions to win the battle. This spiritual battle between you and God is about the control of your life.

ADDRESSING ADDICTION BIBLICALLY (JAMES 1:1-20)

God has both the willingness and the ability to use our trials and our resulting *losses* as fitness stations to restore His image in us (1:2-8). Unaddressed biblically, wrong responses lead to sin and death (1:14-15). God offers hope to us. His hope is “the confident expectation of a good outcome because God is involved keeping His promises. The following key lessons are from James 1:14-15:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Lesson 1—Behind every fall is the pull of our *desires/lusts*.

When you do drugs, repeat the cutting, binge on food again, or sneak back into porn, you must ask yourself, “What am I *wanting* so badly that I’m willing to disobey God to get it? What am I thinking will make me happy instead of a relationship with God? *Unless you are honest about what you really want, you can’t successfully battle your sinful habits.* Sometimes our emotions help us figure out what we desire most. Ask yourself and those you counsel, “Under what circumstances am I most likely to get *angry*, most likely to become *fearful*, or most likely to *despair* and want to give up?”

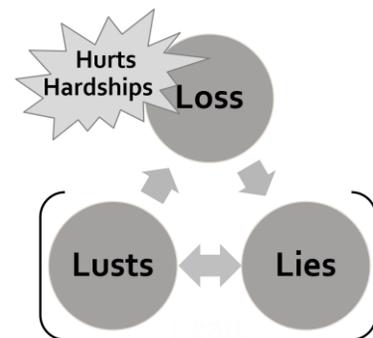


Figure 1—James 1:14-15

Lesson 2—Behind every fall is belief in a *lie*.

Ask yourself and those you counsel,

- “What lies am I believing about *God*?”

2. “What lies am I believing about *myself*?”
3. “What lies am I believing about *the way God’s world works*?”

Lies allow our sinful nature to justify disobedience to God. Satan uses the lies you hear from the world around you and the lies that your own sinful heart generates to keep you in slavery. Jesus said in John 8:32 that the only way out of sin’s slavery is to know truth:

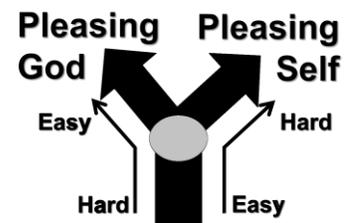
You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

The only source of absolute truth is the Bible—God’s Word. *You cannot be free from life-dominating sins if you are not continually learning, believing, and obeying truth from the Bible.*

Lesson 3—Behind every fall is a *choice* to obey God or to obey our own lusts.

Paul is clear that genuine believers who “are dead to sin” must not “live any longer therein” (Romans 6:2). There are “just two choices on the shelf—pleasing God or pleasing self.” Paul says in Romans 6,

11) Likewise [consider] ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 12) Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13) Neither yield ye your [bodily] members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your [bodily] members as instruments of righteousness unto God. 14) For sin shall not have dominion over you. . . . 16) Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of [teaching] which was delivered you. 18) Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.



"Just two choices on the shelf—pleasing God or pleasing self."¹

Lesson 4—Repeated sin always leads to the *death/loss* of something

Eventually, you seem to lose your ability to choose. Choice seems to die, and an addiction is born. Life seems to be driven by triggers and cravings. Although you are never without the ability to choose, it certainly feels as if you don’t have a choice. You are losing your freedom.

Certainly, you lose your ability to choose the *consequences* of your actions—death of your health, death of your employment, death of your financial situation, death of relationships, death of your emotional well-being, and death of hope.

CONCLUSION

God’s “recovery program” is sanctification; God’s “support group” is the local church.

¹Text and graphic authored by Ken Collier, President of the WILDS. Used with permission.