



## ANTI-ADDICTION DAY

### CULTURAL RESOURCES

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#### **I. Background on Addiction**

J. B. Myers of “Faith and Addiction” defines “addiction” this way:

*An addiction is a compulsion to do something despite the negative consequences. It is not just a compulsion, or a compulsion involving drugs and alcohol, but the giving in to any compulsive behavior despite the negative consequences, and the consequences are of such nature that they lower the quality of life. This definition eliminates the need to distinguish between good and bad compulsions, or to focus on some biological process that is actually the result of an addiction rather than the cause. By definition, addictions involve individual behavior rather than...some external force. Notice that the compulsion is to do something.<sup>1</sup>*

Addictions come in all forms...certainly those that we most commonly associate with addiction: drugs, alcohol, tobacco, pornography, etc., but what about other activities that have become twenty-first century addictions for many:

overspending,  
social networking on sites such as Facebook and MySpace,

computer gaming,  
over-working,  
gambling,  
sexual promiscuity, and  
over-eating?

The scripture for this cultural resource focuses on, among other things, temptation. While temptation is involved in addiction, it is not the whole story. In order to determine the role of temptation in addiction, this unit will focus on alcohol and drug addiction, which are the most studied forms of addiction. There are four decades of research in this area, and much of it can be applied to other addictions as well.

Adult addiction is a pediatric disease, because most adult addicts start using alcohol and drugs regularly by the time they are eight or nine years old. Like most other things to which children have access, children get access to alcohol and drugs regularly through their parents and other adult caretakers.<sup>2</sup> So, children who live in homes with well-stocked wine cabinets, the perpetual case of beer in the refrigerator, or where their parents frequently entertain with alcohol will have regular access to alcohol. Children who live with parents who use and/or sell drugs (including prescription drugs) have regular access to drugs.

Children are often introduced to alcohol and drugs by their parents offering them a “taste.” Other times, they access the substances outside of their parents’ awareness, often out of curiosity. In addition, watching their parents use drugs and alcohol gives substance use the appearance of being “cool” and “grown-up.” This role-modeling more than takes away the sting of the typically bitter taste of alcohol and the stinging lungs associated with smoking cigarettes and marijuana the first few times.

Regular alcohol and drug use does not equal addiction. Like most teens who experiment with alcohol and drugs, many children who do the same thing will not become addicted to alcohol and drugs. However, those who use these substances often enough to experience relief of sadness, fear, loneliness, or some other negative emotion are more likely to use alcohol and drugs time and time again, searching for the relief. This is where temptation is most applicable because these short-cuts to relief are short-lived and destructive.

The problem begins when the brain begins to develop structures around the presence of alcohol and drugs and requires those substances to perform “normally.” This is called addiction. By the time the brain becomes involved in regular alcohol and drug use, temptation moves to the background as a reason for continued use.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the person is merely responding to what his or her brain is telling him or her to do: ingest alcohol and drugs often enough to help it operate “normally.”

Addiction is typically seen as the endpoint on a continuum which includes no substance use, casual substance use, and problematic substance use. People typically begin to experience problems related to substance use well before their brains become dependent on the substances. For example, adults find that they spend a lot of time acquiring, using, and recovering from substance use – which causes them to be late for work and other important events, to forget to

pick up their children and other tasks, and causes problems in their relationships as a result.<sup>4</sup> For children who engage in regular substance use, difficulty with role responsibilities might take a very long time to show up. And, in fact, if they start using alcohol and drugs early enough, their difficulty with role responsibilities might be attributed to their typical behavior pattern (“That’s just how he is”). As a result, it can be more difficult for parents and adult caretakers to detect problematic substance use among children. However, as the problematic substance use advances to addiction, then children do begin to exhibit behaviors consistent with difficulties in role responsibilities. These include refusal to attend school or do homework, refusal to do chores, and challenging the authority of their adult caregivers. These are typically the behaviors that bring attention to childhood drug use.

## **II. Codependency**

The odd thing about addiction is that, although it is one of the most common mental disorders in America (about 10% of Americans 12 years and older are said to be addicted to alcohol and drugs), it is also perhaps the most “ignored” mental disorder as well. As difficult as it is to live with the consequences of addiction, it is often more difficult to deal with the reality of addiction. Therefore, the concept of codependency can be as big of a problem as the primary addiction itself.<sup>5</sup>

Codependency involves loved ones of the addicted person doing all they can to make sure that the addicted person does not experience the natural consequences of his or her addictive behavior. This often takes the form of denying the existence of a problem in the first place. When the problem is acknowledged, then the effort is to protect the family from the immediate negative consequences of the addicted person’s breakdown in role responsibilities. So, the addicted person is excused from chores, school work, child care, and any other responsibility that addiction impedes.

Perhaps the greatest toll of addiction is taken on the family of the addicted person. There are an estimated five loved ones impacted by one person’s addiction. With a 10% addiction rate, that means that 50% of Americans are impacted by addiction. Yet, most intervention is directed towards the addicted person when there is any intervention at all. Some 10% of addicted persons receive treatment. This means that the overwhelming majority of loved ones are left to cope with their addicted loved ones with neither adequate guidance nor advice.<sup>6</sup>

Simply the best thing that loved ones can do is to let addicted people have the natural negative consequences of their addictions, as early as possible. This is where temptation comes in for loved ones: the temptation to rescue is often irresistible. Resisting the temptation takes courage from loved ones because they have to be willing to relinquish the benefits they derive from their loved one’s addiction (e.g., being depended upon, making the major family decisions, controlling family culture, etc.) and to accept the pain of witnessing the outcomes or negative consequences of addiction.

## **III. How Religious Leadership Can Help**

Here is where religious leadership comes into play: providing the support needed by addicted persons' loved ones. This brings the discussion right back around to the issue of temptation, which is particularly germane for non-addicted loved ones. When codependency is established, it can be very difficult to interrupt. Loved ones start rescuing their addicted loved one for specific reasons. Those reasons do not disappear just because they realize that they need to stop rescuing them. For Christians, it becomes imperative to have faith in God's power to deliver their loved ones from addiction, and to benefit from the support of clergy leadership.

Clergy often find it difficult to adequately address the topic of addiction with family members, and typically focus the majority of their efforts on the addicted person, believing that sobriety will solve the family's problems. The reality is that ongoing addiction creates a group of problems, and sobriety may only address one or two of them. Reading the right materials and consulting with addiction treatment professionals are a very important steps for clergy who want to provide the needed support to families impacted by addiction.

#### **IV. Illustration of the Impact of Addiction on the Family**

In Spike Lee's film, Jungle Fever, one secondary story is about the main male character's brother (Gator, played by Samuel L. Jackson) who is addicted to crack cocaine. Jackson accurately portrays the seductiveness of both crack cocaine and the addict based on his real-life experience of both. He and his girlfriend (Vivian, played by actress Halle Berry) vividly show how "crack heads" will do anything for crack cocaine, without regard for themselves or the people who love them. Gator is shown tricking his brother Flipper (played by Wesley Snipes) out of fifty dollars, and trying to seduce his mother out of twenty dollars. The audience gets the sense that Gator has repeated these scenes numerous times.<sup>7</sup>

What is also apparent is the burden these family members experience from their brother's and son's addiction. It is clear that Flipper feels disgust with the way his brother uses him and how he knowingly supports his addiction. Reverend and Mrs. Purify (played by Ossie and Ruby Davis) appear to be isolated and doomed by Gator's addiction. It is clear that they do not agree on how to handle his addiction.<sup>8</sup>

The trickery and seduction shown in the movie are very vivid examples of how family members are subjected to the temptation involved in addiction – without being actively addicted to the substance themselves. The final depiction of the destruction of addiction (as mediated by temptation) is shown in the scene where Reverend Purify kills Gator out of the despair often felt by addicts' loved ones. Instead of this ending the misery, the audience can see that a new type of agony will come with living with the tragedy of killing one's own child.<sup>9</sup>

#### **V. Cultural Reaction – Realities of Recovery**

As in the movies, so it is in real life – there is no talking an addict into recovery. Practitioners say that addiction is like a tornado, it eats up everything in its wake. It takes no prisoners and is no respecter of persons. Likewise, there is no amount of self-control or resisting of temptation that will help an addict enter recovery. One of the greatest weapons that family members have in the fight against addiction is their faith in God's power to deliver their loved ones from their

addiction. Deliverance typically takes the form of formal and informal treatments that provide medical detoxification when needed and guidance and support through stopping alcohol and drug use, and building a life that does not focus on substance use. Self-help recovery groups, such as Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, which are free to use and found in most local communities across the United States, are the most common sources of recovery support.<sup>10</sup> Many recovering addicts talk about the power of praying mothers and grandmothers whose answered prayers lead them to the decision to seek help for their addiction. In addition, appealing to a higher power for help with recovery from addiction is at the heart of most self-help recovery programs. In reviewing their personal reasons for daring to try the long hard road to recovery, many recovering addicts cite being “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” As stated before, family members often rescue their loved ones from becoming sick and tired, when this is actually the route to the decision to engage in recovery efforts.<sup>11</sup>

The final consideration for family members is to understand that the road to recovery is bumpy and full of pitfalls and distractions. Even addicts who are serious about recovery can be expected to move in and out of substance use repeatedly while they are trying to gain lasting recovery. This means that loved ones need to continue to resist the temptation to rescue their loved ones when they start putting forth effort to begin living without drugs and alcohol. Drawing and maintaining a line in the sand with loved ones might be made a bit easier by realizing that addicts will never be able to repay their family members for the pain and suffering they have caused, no matter how many years of recovery they manage to build.<sup>12</sup>

## **VI. Songs**

Songs that illustrate the protective nature of God are useful in reminding loved ones of God’s supernatural powers to help them and their loved ones through the burdens and horrors of addiction. I believe there are three songs that are particularly applicable: “Yield Not to Temptation,” “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” and “Trust and Obey.”

### **Yield Not To Temptation**

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;  
Each victory will help you some other to win;  
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdued,  
Look ever to Jesus, He’ll carry you through.

Refrain

Ask the Savior to help you,  
Comfort, strengthen and keep you;  
He is willing to aid you,  
He will carry you through.

Shun evil companions, bad language disdain,  
God’s Name hold in reverence, nor take it in vain;  
Be thoughtful and earnest, kindhearted and true,  
Look ever to Jesus, He’ll carry you through.

Refrain

To him that o'ercometh, God giveth a crown;  
Through faith we shall conquer, though often cast down;  
He Who is our Savior our strength will renew;  
Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through.

Refrain<sup>13</sup>

### **What a Friend We Have in Jesus**

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble any where?  
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised Thou wilt all our burdens bear  
May we ever, Lord, be bringing all to Thee in earnest prayer.  
Soon in glory bright unclouded there will be no need for prayer  
Rapture, praise and endless worship will be our sweet portion there.<sup>14</sup>

### **Trust and Obey**

When we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word,  
What a glory he sheds on our way!  
While we do his good will, he abides with us still,  
And with all who will trust and obey.

Refrain

Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,  
But his smile quickly drives it away;  
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,  
Can abide while we trust and obey.

Refrain

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,  
But our toil he doth richly repay;  
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,  
But is blessed if we trust and obey.

Refrain

But we never can prove the delights of his love  
Until all on the altar we lay;  
For the favor he shows, for the joy he bestows,  
Are for them who will trust and obey.

Refrain

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at his feet.  
Or we'll walk by his side in the way.  
What he says we will do, where he sends we will go;  
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Refrain<sup>15</sup>

## VII. Making it a Memorable Learning Moment

- Congregations and clergy can learn more about addiction through the film series Addiction, which was created by HBO. The series can be viewed free at <http://www.hbo.com/addiction/thefilm/>. HBO encourages group screenings of the series.<sup>16</sup>
- Congregations and clergy leadership can begin helping family members of addicts immediately by forming a monthly prayer and support group where congregants can meet and discuss their challenges and concerns and receive prayer and support specific to their families.
- Congregations can host free self-help support group meeting such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous for community members.

### Notes

1. Myers, J. B. "Addiction Defined." Faith and Addiction. Online location: [http://jbmyers.net/?page\\_id=9](http://jbmyers.net/?page_id=9) accessed 18 January 2009
2. Hoffman, J. and Susan Froemke, et al. Addiction. New York: Home Box Office, 2006. Online at <http://www.hbo.com/addiction/thefilm/> accessed 18 January 2009
3. Ibid.

4. Rounds-Bryant, J.L. "Family Members Support Alcohol and Drug Addiction." Men Don't Like Kids! 5 Ugly Facts About Human Behavior. Research Triangle Park, NC: Mental Health Solutions, 2007. p. 37
5. Ibid., p. 33
6. Hoffman, J. and Susan Froemke, et al. Addiction.
7. Lee, Spike, Wesley Snipes, and Annabella Sciorra. Jungle Fever. Universal City, CA: MCA/Universal Home Video, 1992.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Rounds-Bryant, J.L. "Family Members Support Alcohol and Drug Addiction." p. 46
11. Ibid., p. 37
12. Ibid., p. 52
13. "Yield Not to Temptation." By Horatio Palmer
14. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." By Joseph Scriven
15. "Trust and Obey." By John H. Sammis
16. <http://www.hbo.com/addiction/thefilm/> Hoffman, J. and Susan Froemke, et al. Addiction.