

# CHRISTIANS AND ADDICTION

*Proverbs 14:12*

**Ezekiel Oghenekaro**

Christians still struggles with sin. Late coming to worship, lying, anger, bitterness. Therefore, the church deem it fit to always edify the saints to overcome sin and its influence. However, many struggles with addictions. Addictions to marijuana, to alcohol, to pornography, to gambling, to overeating, to shopping, games, phones, movies etc. Since many Christians struggle with the sins of addiction they begin to doubt their own salvation. They feel it is impossible to break out this vicious cycle. Jesus came not only to die for our sins, but also to help us with our problems or challenges.

According to Medical News Today, *Addiction is an inability to stop using a substance or engaging in a behaviour even though it is causing psychological and physical harm.* Addiction is the condition of being enslaved to a habit or practice to such an extent that stopping it would cause severe trauma. It is a compulsion. It is an abnormally strong craving for some thing or activity. It refers to anything that controls us, especially things that are not constructive or helpful. The most reliable sign of addiction is **continued involvement** in the addictive activity despite negative, life-damaging consequences.

**Proverbs 14:12** says, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death.”* Although that verse applies to many situations in life, it is a perfect description of addiction. Addictions come in many forms. We immediately think of alcohol and drugs when we hear the term, but people can become addicted to many things: food, gambling, shopping, work, cigarettes, pornography, masturbation, the internet, video games, smart phones, social media, movies, texting, pain meds and so on.

One person described her addiction this way: *“It was the **best thing** until it became the **worst thing.**”* That could almost be a mantra for any addiction. It is always that way. Whether it is alcohol or something else, it is always the best thing until it becomes the worst thing. There is a way that seems right to you – it is the best thing, the very best thing, the only thing, nothing matters to me more than this – but in the end it leads to death, destruction, and even low self-esteem. And it is not even the thing itself that is really the problem, but it is your addiction to the thing. Your addiction itself is the real issue.

## **Causes Of Addiction/Risk Factors**

The following can increase the risk of addiction.

- **Family history:** A person's genes play an important role in addiction and might account for 40-60 percent of addiction risk. Researchers are exploring the relationship between genetics and addiction.
- **Family life:** A healthy home environment during childhood is essential for reducing the risk of addiction later. Being around authority figures and family members who use drugs can increase the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder later in life.
- **Peers and school life:** The increasing influences of friends and peers throughout a person's teenage years can have a significant impact on whether or not they use drugs. Many people without other risk factors try drugs for the first time to connect with a peer group. Children and teenagers who are struggling with schoolwork or feeling excluded socially may face a higher risk of trying drugs and developing a substance use disorder.
- **The age at which a person first consumes drugs:** The earlier a person takes a mood-altering substance, the more likely it becomes that they will develop a substance abuse disorder.
- **The method of delivery:** The way in which a person takes a drug can impact the development of an addiction. Smoking and injecting substances means that the brain registers their effect in seconds but also loses the rush quickly. These quick changes in sensation can drive people to repeat drug use to recapture the state of euphoria they experienced before.
- **The nature of the substance:** Some drugs, such as nicotine, crack, or heroin, contain specific compounds or set off receptors in the body that trigger addictive responses. For some people, trying a substance just once may be enough to kick-start a pattern of behaviors that can result in addiction.
- **Stress/Boredom:** High stress levels or boredom may increase a person's risk of turning to a substance, such as alcohol or marijuana, gambling, video games to reduce stress or take away their boredom.
- **Metabolism:** The way in which a person absorbs, and processes compounds can determine the effect a drug will have on their body and the sensation it causes. For example, variations in metabolism can result in a drug's duration of effect lasting for longer or shorter periods.

This can lead to tolerance, which could result in the person needing to use a higher dose or a more frequent dose of a particular drug in to achieve the same effects. This increases the risk of addiction.

### **Understanding addiction**

There are many ways to describe the progression of addiction and how a person becomes addicted but let me outline for you a simple four-step process that seems to cover the main bases. Addiction begins with *hurt* or a *craving*, which leads to escape, which leads to deception, which leads to slavery.

#### **A. Hurt or Craving (*Proverbs 18:14*)**

Let's start at the beginning. Addiction begins with hurt. It may be loneliness, guilt, or shame, but at the heart of every addiction there is a deep and lingering hurt that has never been

resolved. It may be a pain from your childhood or some traumatic event in your life, but there is always an underlying issue that you have never fully addressed.

That is a scary thought for some people, which is why they continue in their addiction. In fact, that is the whole point of their addiction. We do not want to address the underlying issue, and that is why we try to cover it up with alcohol, drugs, work, or food.

The Bible acknowledges the heart-breaking issues of life. **Proverbs 18:14** says “*A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?*” God knows a crushed spirit is more than we can bear, and that is why he offers to bear it for us. But when we go looking for God in all the wrong places, we often substitute a life-killing addiction for God’s actual healing. Addiction begins with hurt.

### **B. Escape (*James 1:13-14*)**

Next comes escape. We cannot bear the emotional pain, and so we seek escape in our addiction. And we find escape in something that seems so wonderful, something that makes us feel good for a change, something that soothes all the bad feelings and numbs the pain. It is how we learn to cope with our hurt. It is the ***best thing*** in the world until it becomes the ***worst thing***. And it becomes the main desire in our life.

Addiction has to do with our desires. We make excuses, and we try to duck responsibility, but it all comes back to our desires gone wrong. **James 1** says, “*But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*” (**James 1:14-15**)

When we are addicted, we experience this cycle of temptation, desire and sin over and over and over again. We eventually despair of ever breaking the cycle, but there is hope. Others have broken the cycle, and you can too. But you must first understand what it is you are doing and why. Addiction begins with hurt which then leads to escape.

### **C. Deception (*Jeremiah 17:9*)**

Next comes deception. This is one of the most insidious parts of addiction: the lies we tell each other and the lies we tell ourselves. We become experts at hiding our addiction. We hide it because we are afraid it will be taken away from us if it is discovered. And we do not know that we can live without it. So, we lie, we deceive, we manipulate, we blame, and in the process, we lose all true sense of self. **Jeremiah 17:9** says, “*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*” And this is never truer than when we are talking about addiction.

The addict’s two main tools are deception and denial. The alcoholic hides bottles around the house. The porn addict encrypts computer files on the hard drive and wipes the browsing history clean. The shop-a-holic keeps separate stashes of money and hides the receipts. The food addict purges in private, and the gambler lies about where all the money went.

And talk about denial? Addicts are master manipulators. Just try confronting me with my addiction, and you will hear an unending stream of deflection and excuses expertly designed to prevent you from touching my idol, my best thing. I might even make you feel guilty for asking. Here are some of the common lie addicts say all the time. See if you recognize any of these:

*"One drink isn't going to hurt."*

*"I just need a little something to relax me."*

*"I've worked hard, and I deserve this."*

*"I can handle it."*

*"It's not that big a deal."*

*"This will be the last time." (Note: The only way it will ever be the last time is if the last time was the last time, not this time.)*

*"I can stop anytime I want." Or the flip side to this one: "I can't stop anyway, so why even try?"*

Even chemical dependency is a lie. It is a physical lie. It is your body telling you that you will die if you do not continue with the addictive substance. It is not true. You will go through withdrawal, and you will need a doctor's care, but you will not die. And we don't just lie to each other. We lie to ourselves. Deception is a tragic part of every addiction. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)*

#### **D. Slavery (Genesis 4:7; Proverbs 23:29-35; Romans 6:16)**

Addiction begins with hurt, which leads to escape, which leads to deception, which leads to slavery. And this is really the main problem with addiction. It is bondage; it is dependency; it is slavery. Mark Shaw writes: *"Physical addiction occurs when you repeatedly satisfy a natural appetite and desire with a temporary pleasure until you become the servant of the temporary object of pleasure rather than its master."* (Mark Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction*) God told Cain back in **Genesis 4:7**: *"Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."* Addiction works the other way. Addiction desires to have you, and it becomes your master. (**Proverbs 23:29-35**)

**Proverbs 23:29-35** shows all the negative effects the alcohol is having on a person's life, and yet it is still the driving force in their lives. What is their final cry? *"When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"* This is the cry of every addict. No matter how negative or destructive the effects, our addiction is the driving force in our lives, and everything is oriented around when can I get the next drink or the next fix or whatever it is that is controlling me.

**Romans 6:16** says, *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"* Addiction is slavery, but it is a voluntary slavery. We offer ourselves to our addictions instead of to God, and when you offer yourself to someone to obey him as a slave, you are slaves to the one whom you obey. Addiction begins with hurt, which then leads to escape, which then leads to deception, which then leads to slavery.

## **Dealing with addiction**

So how do you deal with addiction? Let me close out this message by sharing eight principles from God's word that will help us deal with the problem of addiction.

### **A. God knows and loves Us (*Hebrews 4:13; Romans 5:8*)**

Number one, God knows us and loves us. **Hebrews 4:13** says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." God knows our secret, and he loves us anyways.

He has always loved us. He has always wanted to be there for us and to heal that hurt or pain in our life. **Romans 5:8** says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In other words, we do not have to clean ourselves up before we come to God. Come to God as you are and let him do the cleaning up. Jesus died for us when we were still sinners. God knows us and loves us.

### **B. It is a spiritual battle (*Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8*)**

Number two, it is a spiritual battle. **Ephesians 6:12** says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." There is a whole spiritual world out there that is aligned against you. No wonder you feel overwhelmed.

**1 Peter 5:8** says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (**1 Peter 5:8**) There is a spiritual battle going on for our soul, and Satan wants to use our addiction against us to destroy us. Do not be deceived. It is a spiritual battle.

### **C. There is hope in God (*Psalms 25:3; John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 6:11*)**

Number three, there is hope in God. A lot of addicts have lost hope. They have tried and failed to kick the habit so many times, they think there is no way out. But there is always hope in God.

**Psalm 25:3** says, "No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame." A lot of us feel a burning shame over our addictions. It is one of the reasons we keep it hidden, why we are scared to death of getting caught or found out. The private shame is bad enough, but the public shame would be unbearable. If that, is you this morning, will you take comfort in **Psalm 25:3**? *No one who puts their hope in God will ever be put to shame.*

There is hope in God. You do not need to be an addict forever. That is not what God wants for you. Jesus said in **John 10**: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." (**John 10:10**).

### **D. You need God's help (*Romans 7:15-25; 1 Corinthians 10:13*)**

Which leads us to the next point. You need God's help. You have been escaping your hurt for so long, and you are so deep in deception and slavery that you cannot beat this on your own.

It is a spiritual battle, and you need God's help. Perhaps you can relate to what the apostle Paul said about himself in **Romans 7**:

*"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do ... I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:15-25)*

Paul was talking about indwelling sin in his life, but the words are easily applied to addiction. Perhaps you have even spoken those same words. *"What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* The answer is no one, except God. God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to rescue you from your sins. Only Jesus can help you overcome temptation and sin.

**1 Corinthians 10:13** says, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* You are not the only person experiencing this addiction. God has helped others, and he will help you. But you will never beat it without him. You need God's help.

**E. You need good people (1 Corinthians 15:33; Hebrews 3:13)**

Number five you need good people around you. **1 Corinthians 15:33** says, *"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"* If there are people or relationships in your life that are a negative influence in your life, you need to make a break with them, at least until God has brought your life under control. You need to surround yourself with good people who will encourage you, and hold you accountable, and help you make good decisions. That is why we have the body of Christ. As **Hebrews 3:13** says, *"Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."*

**F. Truth is your friend (John 8:31-36; 1 John 1:8-9)**

Number six, truth is your friend. You may have been lying to others and yourself so long you do not even know what the truth looks like anymore, but you need to get reacquainted. Jesus said, *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free ... So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."* (**John 8:31-36**) Lies bring slavery, the truth brings freedom. You need to commit yourself to the truth in all areas of your life if you truly want to break free.

Truth begins with confession. **1 John 1** says: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (**1 John 1:8-9**) Forgiveness for all your sins and cleansing from all your past is only a confession away. You have been lying too long. Truth is your friend.

**G. Speak to Someone (James 5:16)**

Speak to someone preferably a trusted spiritual leader. Addiction is a burden and most times the devil make you lie to yourself. It is high time to speak to someone trustworthy. A counsellor, a minister, a bishop, a trusted friend with higher spiritual principles. I know we in Africa do not believe in therapy. Therapy is advisable as it helps to guide us aright.

It is note worthy that you that is in the position of a counsellor, a preacher, bishop etc should avoid judging the addicts as you may end up discouraging such a one from breaking free from this problem.

**H. Grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*)  
- especially self-control (*Ephesians 5:18*)**

And then finally grow in the fruit of the Holy Spirit, especially self-control. *Ephesians 5:18* says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." The idea is this: Do not be controlled by wine but be controlled by the Spirit of God as he works in you and changes you from within to be more like Jesus.

**CONCLUSION**

Addiction is a serious problem that affects society, families, and individuals. If you are struggling with an addiction this morning, you need help. There's no quick fix to your problem. It will take time and determination, but with God's help and by applying these principles from God's Word to your situation, you can have victory. Will you give your addiction to God this morning?

**References**

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