

# OVERCOMING ADDICTION

## Biodun, Adegoroye

A keynote lecture presented at the Church of Christ, Grey Street, Warri during her Annual Bible Lectureship on 9th September 2023.

**Theme: Breaking Free**

**Text: John 8.32**

### Exordium

The story is told of an Arab travelling in the desert on his camel and decided to rest for the night. He put up his tent in the cold night and settled comfortably to enjoy the warmth in his tent while the camel stood obediently outside. At midnight, the camel knocked at the tent and pleaded that the master allow him to place his nose inside the tent since it was very cold and it was having difficulty breathing. The Arab master obliged but after another hour, the camel pleaded once more that its ears which are frozen be allowed to come into the tent to 'thaw.' The Arab was kind and he obliged. Soon, the camel pleaded for the neck, the fore legs and finally the whole body and was allowed to move in with its master. Sure enough, since the tent wasn't built for both animal and human and the tent was now crowded and hot, the master politely asked the camel to begin backing out of the tent. The camel look incredulously at the master and smiled! He told the master that if he wishes to get cooler, he better go outside but for it, the tent is quite comfortable and it is not in any way going to go outside the tent!

This story is an allegory about how a habit, or addiction begins in a non-threatening manner but later takes control of the life and situation of the 'master' becoming so entrenched that life becomes miserably shared with the 'camel' who refuses to leave! This mythological story is analogous to the challenge faced by many who are addicted to a substance, habit or lifestyle with all the ungodly consequences being faced without hope of succour! Addiction usually has an innocuous beginning and will never be thought of as something that will eventually take physical and psychological control of one's life. The reality however is that it happens and this paper is presented in hope that some may be delivered from this horrible menace that afflicts the lives of many in the church. The paper is presented with four sections including: Definitions, types and descriptions of various addictions and addictive substances; Underlying problems of addiction and the biblically prescribed way to 'break free.' Some suggestions are added for those personally afflicted to help them be overcomers.

### I. Definitions, Types and Descriptions

#### a) Definitions

Addiction involves the **compulsive** and **harmful dependence** on **substances** or **behaviours** that **negatively impact** physical, mental, and spiritual **well-being**.

From this definition, the six or more variables can be teased out:

- Compulsion
- Harmful dependence
- Substance abuse
- Addictive behaviours
- Negative impact
- Well-being.

These six terms reflect that addiction is harmful and controlling. *“Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is helpful. Everything is permissible for me, but I will not allow anything to control me.”* (1Co 6:12). A slave knows how hard the loss of freedom is. Paul warns:

*“Therefore, do not let sin rule your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires. Stop offering the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. Instead, offer yourselves to God as people who have been brought from death to life and the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness to God.”* (Rom 6:12-13) The reason a Christian should not allow any part of his body -eyes, mouth, heart and soul to be enslaved to anything is because as Paul asks, *“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”* (Rom 6:16)

Wikipedia defines addiction as *“generally a neuropsychological disorder defining pervasive and intense urge to engage in maladaptive behaviours providing immediate sensory rewards, despite their harmful consequences.”* It also looks at dependence as a “an addiction that can involve withdrawal issues.” (Wikipedia)

It involves *“an inability to stop using a substance or engaging in a behaviour even though it may cause psychological or physical harm.”* (<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323465>)

## b) Types

There are two main groups of addiction:

- Substance addictions.
- Non-substance addictions (behavioural addictions).
  1. **Substance Addiction**
    - Alcohol.
    - Caffeine.
    - Cannabis (marijuana).
    - Hallucinogens, such as PCP and LSD.
    - Hypnotics, sedatives and anti-anxiety drugs, such as sleeping pills.
    - Prescription and non-prescription opioids, such as codeine, oxycodone and heroin.
    - Prescription and non-prescription stimulants, such as Adderall®, cocaine and methamphetamine.
    - Tobacco/nicotine, such as smoking cigarettes and electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes or vaping).

## 2. Most common addictions

- a. Alcohol
- b. Nicotine
- c. Marijuana

### 3. Non-substance Addiction

- Gambling.
- Kleptomania (a recurrent urge to steal, typically without regard for need or profit)
- Eating.
- Exercising or dieting.
- Shopping.
- Gossiping.
- Domestic Abuse/Violence
- Shoplifting or other risky behaviours.
- Having sex.
- Viewing pornography.
- Masturbation
- Video gaming.
- Using the internet (such as on your phone or a computer). Many are addicted to the use of their phones.

## II. Symptoms, Causes, Underlying Problem of Addiction

### a. Signs of Addiction

- Inability to stop: People may use a substance or engage in harmful addictive behaviour even if they want to stop.
- Increased tolerance: Over time, they may need more of the substance or activity to feel the same euphoric effects as they did before.
- Intense focus on the substance or activity: People with addictions become pathologically preoccupied with the substance or activity.
- Lack of control: a feeling of loss of complete control over substance use or activity and often feel helpless.
- Personal problems and health issues: it impacts all aspects of their lives, including their physical health, mental health, personal relationships and career.
- Withdrawal: People with addiction may experience emotional and physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop using.

### b. Causes of Addiction

There's not a single cause of addiction — it is a very complex condition.

A significant part of how addiction develops is through changes in your brain chemistry. Substances and certain activities affect your brain, especially the reward centre of your brain. Humans are biologically motivated to seek rewards. Often, these rewards come from healthy behaviours—spending time with a loved one or eating a delicious meal, your body releases a chemical called **dopamine**, which makes you feel pleasure. Then, it becomes a cycle: You seek out these experiences because they reward you with good feelings or with pleasure.

Some substances send massive surges of dopamine through your brain, too, as well as certain activities, like having sex or spending money. But instead of motivating you to do the things you need to do to survive (eat, work and spend time with loved ones), such

massive dopamine levels can have damaging effects on your thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

This can create an unhealthy drive to seek more pleasure from the substance or activity and less from healthier activities.

Over time, the substances or activities change your brain chemistry, and you become desensitized to their effects. You then need more to produce the same effect.

For some substances, such as opioids, the withdrawal symptoms are so severe that they create significant motivation to continue using them.

**c. Other Factors that Contribute to the Development of Addictions include:**

- **Genetics:** Studies show that genetic factors are responsible for 40% to 60% of the vulnerability to any substance use disorder (SUD).
- **Mental health conditions:** There's a strong link between addiction and mental health conditions, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and bipolar disorder.
- **Environmental factors:** Access to substances is a particularly significant environmental risk factor. Factors that increase the extent of exposure and the opportunity for substance use include the use of substances by a member of your household or your peers and being prescribed medications that can be misused, such as opioids or stimulants. Addiction can become an idol that replaces God's rightful place in our lives (Exo 20:3).

**d. The Root Causes of Addiction**

- Ask yourself the major question: "How did my addiction start, or when did it start? Telling ourselves the truth will help us admit that we strayed from God, or didn't know God and just got led to the slaughter by others. E.G. Is it love for cheap money without work that led you to gambling, or the love for fun and careless adventure or boredom? What of pornography? How did you start? Watching sexually explicit movies with friends, or stumbling on a nude picture and you decided to do more of it?"

**Case Study: 2 Samuel 11:2-4**

David started by seeing a woman in the nude, bathing and he became hooked. The order- **See, Desire, Touch or Seek!** Same MO used in the Garden of Eden. Satan dangles the bait, you see, and you desire and you seek it or touched it! (Gen 3:1-6). The rest of the story is typical of addiction to sexual impurity. He deliberately and intentionally sent for her. What was he thinking when he brings her up-close? In his heart, he had already decided to pursue sin! That is the problem of the second look when a woman greets you. The second look is the picture we deliberately capture in our hearts to replay to our convenience to lust after her in our hearts even before any other steps are taken.

The root of addiction can then be summarized as the following:

- **Sin and Brokenness:** the fallen nature of humanity and how it contributes to addiction (Rom 3:23).
- **Emotional Pain and Trauma:** unresolved emotional pain, trauma, and difficult life circumstances can lead individuals to seek solace in addictive behaviours (Psa 34:18; Isa 61:1-3).

- Spiritual emptiness: a lack of spiritual fulfilment and a deep longing for meaning and purpose can drive people towards addictive behaviours (Mat 5:6).

#### e. Consequences

- Physical Consequences: detrimental effects of addiction on the body and overall health (Pro 23:29-35).
- Economic Consequences: There may be serious economic consequences as well as the slave becomes unable to be responsible especially with substance abuse. Some alcoholics cannot hold a regular job. Gamblers become impoverished as they become irresponsible with their income and always hoping to make more money without working. Someone addicted to pornography may spend inordinate time gazing at nude pictures and not engage in gainful employment. A student may fail examinations, miss classes because of addiction leading to loss of economic progress.
- Mental and Emotional Consequences: addiction can lead to anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and deteriorating mental health (Psa 32:3-4).
- Relational and Spiritual Consequences: addiction can strain relationships, hinder spiritual growth, and distance individuals from God's love (1Cor 6:9-11).

### III. Biblically Prescribed Way to 'Break Free.'

We may begin with the obvious truth that prevention is better (and cheaper) than cure!

- Our bodies, time and all resources that we have, belong to God (1Cor 6.19, 20; 2Pet 1:3) and that we are only stewards who are to be faithful in the use and allocation of these resources for the Master (1Cor 4.2; 1Pet 4.10-11). Our perception should inform our attitudes and behaviour. If God is Lord, then we must 'put off' and 'put on' thereby sustaining the death of the old man of sin. To put off is to make holy by separating something for sacred use. The O.T. temple was dedicated for holy use and when business men profaned the temple selling common things, Jesus responded and pushed those things out of the temple! (Joh 2:14-17) In application, the body of a Christian is God's temple and we must separate it for God's use and not for profane use. This thought creates what is regarded as dissonance and hinders the mind from accepting to profane the holy.
  - a. **Consciousness of Holiness helps us to overcome addictions.** The mind must be overpowered by an overwhelming sense of the presence of God. When a man is suddenly aware of HIV in the woman with whom he is about to commit fortification, his desire swiftly diminishes and may evaporate for his sense of preservation takes over. Only few, who are mentally unstable, will commit "Sepuku"-suicide. For instance, none will willingly go and get an infection that can lead to AIDS without fear. This fear (or respect of danger) is what is given to high tension power lines. You give "gap" and distance because of the deadly consequence of "romancing" with live wire! The practical benefits of this cognitive-spiritual dissonance explain why Tobacco companies are forced to put a dissonant statement on packets of cigarettes saying, "Cigarette smokers are liable to die young," or Cigarette smoking is dangerous to health." It is believed that the addiction and urge to smoke is reduced significantly when people read the notice before they begin to smoke. There are some spiritual -cognitive dissonance for sexual and alcohol addicts too in the Bible.

*“Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.” (Pro 5:18-23)*

*“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry, but if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house. He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts.” (Pro 6:27-35)*

*“The woman Folly is loud; she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house; she takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!” And to him who lacks sense she says, “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.” But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.” (Pro 9:13-18; cf. Heb 4:13)*

Imagine the dissonance created by picturing demons urging you to commit fornication by the statement, *“But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.”* A deterring thought comes when we know that what we are about to do is not in secret but that some beings are there looking at us and urging us to join them in the fall. Again, God sees all (Heb 4:13; Psa 139:7-12)

- b. **Bringing in the Forces of Heaven.** Addicts who are Christians have weapons that are usually untapped.
  - i. **Prayers.** It is said that prayers will keep a man from sin, and sin will keep a man from prayers. When we pray at the moment of temptation, the forces of heaven are liberated to come to our aid! In prayer, the mind is contrite, focusing on God power and Him who is described as one *“who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us”* (Eph 3:20). It would be hard to find a Christian giving thanks to God for the fornication he is about to engage in! On the contrary, immediately his mind goes to God, a dampening effect comes up on his desire and drive and the power of God comes into the equation. A prayer like that of the tax collector of Luke 18:13 *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”* justifies and accesses the power of the Almighty.
  - ii. **Confession** which is an integral part of prayer is what the Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) begins with. To confess, (**homologeō** Greek -to speak in agreement with God), is an admission that one is a sinner and it leads to salvation and deliverance! One, who is contrite and begging God for forgiveness in tears and hope, will get the help to overcome his present

addictive desire to continue in sin! (Rom 10:8-9; 1Joh 1:9). The story is told of a sister who requested for prayers before sexual immorality that a brother requested from her and sure enough, the mood in the room changed! It is either the prayer will be sincere and change the mood or the brother will not pray in order to continue. God, certainly, is kept out for addiction to continue having its sway.

- iii. **Singing Praises** is another spiritual activity that brings a dissonance and strengthens the spirit when faced with a defeating situation of repeated backsliding into addiction. David wrote many of the Psalms when he was experiencing failure and defeat. He used songs to lift king Saul out of depression and oppression. Addiction is an oppressive spirit! A Psalm is a song written to be sung. Singing has untapped powers. Paul and Silas were helped in prison as they sang hymns to God. Singing and praying are to be done the same way (1Cor 14:15), with understanding and with the spirit. The spirit in which songs are rendered to God from the heart (Eph 5:19) dispels illicit desires and brings the power of God into the equation.

#### IV. OVERCOMING:

- a. **Acknowledge the Problem:** Proverbs 28:13 – *“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”* It is crucial to acknowledge the presence of addiction in our lives and the negative impact it has on us and others.
- b. **Have a plan:** Denzel Washington stated this in a commencement speech, “Dreams without goals are just dreams and they ultimately fuel disappointment. So have dreams, but have goals!” If you wish to be delivered from addiction, you must have a credible plan to move you towards achieving your dream of emancipation with the realistic, workable goals or plan. Many times, people just stay on the same spot because they do not have plan. Jesus said that we must sit down and plan before we set out to build (back our lives) (Luk 14:28). Denzel suggested that to succeed, we must apply discipline and consistency. We must be persistent. We must also:
- c. **Seek God's Help:** Psalms 121:2 - We must turn to God and seek His strength, guidance, and grace in overcoming addiction. Prayer and regular communion with God are essential in this process.
- d. **Repentance and Transformation:** 2 Corinthians 5:17 - *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* We need to turn away from our addictive behaviours and turn towards God.
- e. **Renewing the mind:** Romans 12:2 - *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”* We must actively engage in renewing our minds with God's truth.
- f. **Seek Support:** Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 - *“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”* Seek support from trusted friends, family, or a support group within the church.

- g. **Guard Against Temptation:** 1 Corinthians 10:13 - *"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it."* Recognize triggers and situations that may lead to relapse. Develop strategies to avoid or overcome these temptations and lean on God's strength to resist them.
- h. **Cultivate Healthy Habits:** a. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies."* Engage in activities that promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This may include exercise, healthy eating, engaging in hobbies, listening to spiritual messages and music, and pursuing positive relationships.
- i. **Find Purpose in God:** a. Jeremiah 29:11 - *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Discover and embrace the unique purpose God has for your life. Allow your passion for serving God and others to replace the void left by addiction.

## V. CONCLUSION: HELPING SOMEONE WITH AN ADDICTION

We need to speak up sooner rather than later: The earlier a person with addiction receives treatment, the better. Treatment may include medical care which will need the support of everyone especially family members as the person goes into therapy. Address your concerns and help an addict find treatment as soon as possible. Offer your help and support without being judgmental. Practice empathy. Even when you don't agree with your loved one, listen thoughtfully to them. The more your loved one feels heard, the more they'll see you as someone they can trust. Be patient: Don't expect a single conversation or action to fix your loved one's addiction. Learn to take care of yourself: The friends and family members of people with addiction often experience stress, depression, grief and isolation. It is important to take care of your mental health and seek help if you're experiencing these symptoms. Consider joining a support group or organization in your community. If the church forms a support group like the AA, it will be a welcome development. Overcoming addiction is a challenging journey, but with God's help and the support of others, victory is possible. *"Aluta continua, Victoria ascerta!"*

Abiodun E. Adegoye Serves with the Church at Kado Abuja. He can be contacted with 08033824662; [abiodynadegoroye@gmail.com](mailto:abiodynadegoroye@gmail.com)