

What are your addictions?

In counseling we deal with addictions every day. The word *addiction* is known by all. What does it mean to you? Most of us think of the very obvious forms: alcoholism, workaholism, drugs, cigarettes, gambling, etc. We may also think of addictions to sex/pornography, or perhaps you are aware of the latest to hit our offices, internet addiction. These are all observable and extremely problematic compulsions. So what does the Bible have to say on the topic of addictions?.. Not a thing. Scripture does not have a direct reference to having an addiction.

Perhaps we need a good definition of the word. The dictionary says that to be addicted is to give or devote oneself habitually or compulsively. I would describe it as something in life that holds power over us, calls our name constantly and tenaciously until we serve or temporarily gratify its request. I think the apostle Paul came the closest to describing an addiction in Romans 7:15-16 when he said, *For that which I am doing I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.* Paul then goes on to describe the war between his mind and his flesh. If you read the entire passage, Paul sounds schizophrenic. But indeed that is precisely what a destructive addiction feels like. We are ever doing the very thing that is destroying us and our relationships. We hate it, but we love it too. I have observed that individuals often proclaim their hatred for their compulsion but many deceive themselves. I believe they want to hate it, but the problem is that they don't. Some even call it their friend. But Paul concludes that these things that control us are evil and says that the only way out of this "prison of death" is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I have come to believe that all people have addictive natures. I would even go so far as to say that God created us this way. It seems that all mankind is searching for something. We seem to have a void that is never quite fulfilled to satisfaction. In reality, only our God is able to fill this vacuum within us. Even this will be incomplete in this life. On a highly destructive level many are seduced into believing that sex, alcohol, drugs, etc. may satisfy, but they never do. We will only continue to need more of whatever our addiction is to find the illusion of even temporary fulfillment.

How about the socially acceptable forms of addiction: work, exercise, sports, hobbies, food, television, entertainment. These all have incredibly addictive qualities. What about religion? Can that be negatively addicting?

Anything can. Everything has the ability to become obsession. Have you ever thought of attitudes and emotions as addictions? Anger, rage, jealousy, fear, criticalness? What about illnesses? Yes, even those can have addictive power over us. These all can become addictions in that we become slave to them, we serve them. They seem to have more power than we do. Behavioral addictions are easy to spot. The subtle ones and socially acceptable ones are often times the most dangerous because they remain in darkness. My point is that it really doesn't matter what it may be, we are of an extremely addictive nature by our design. We *need* God and all else will fail us. I believe along with Paul that we will be slave to something, sin or righteousness (Rom 6 16-18).

My personal approach to working with addictions is to back off on getting too attached to the clinical concept of addiction, which would convince us that we really can't help our compulsive behaviors and have no choice in the matter. If we take this view, we would have no free will to choose, and that would be Biblically inaccurate. Contrary to step one in the very popular 12 step addiction programs, I do not agree that we are powerless over our addiction (compulsive behavior). I believe that we have given our power away to it and we need to take it back. The apostle Paul again said that he is determined to not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12). Here, we get to the crux of the matter. We are not to be mastered by any thing, behavior, attitude, or emotion or it will become our master. And we only have one Master. I am never overly concerned about who comes in with what addiction because the overcoming process is similar.

The seductive force of compulsive behavior is powerful, especially when we have given in to it and have practiced the behavior over and over. But it certainly is not omnipotent as many are deceived into believing. Once the mind is convinced of this lie, the will/flesh will set out to prove it. It takes a long hard journey to come out from under the deceptive voice of addiction. And the battle certainly cannot be fought alone. Does anything other than God have mastery over you? Consider whether these may be your personal addictions.

As a final note, I do not want to confuse addiction with passion. Passion about healthy pursuits is wonderful and desirable and drives us forward in a healthy manner. However, if our passions become obsessions, no matter how noble the pursuit, we have become slave to something, and misery and discontent are sure to follow.