

ADDICTION

&



HELP

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What is addiction?

“I cannot control myself anymore.”



About forty years old and successfully self-employed. Quick, athletic, and alert. But on the weekend he drinks—not beer but vodka, and lots of it. Afterwards he has a headache, can't concentrate well. His liver values are raised. He knows he drinks too much; he knows he's in danger; he knows his wife is suffering. And he's sorry about it. But he doesn't change. He is addicted. The vodka is in control.

Thin and haggard; exhausted, but with a determined gaze. For many years she has refused to gain weight. Absolutely crazy—but gaining weight is like a nightmare to her. Absolutely crazy—and she knows it. The family has resigned, all attempts at therapy have failed. Her blood values are bad and she wants help. But there's one thing she doesn't want to change: her weight. That's addiction too. She has lost control—her weight is controlling her.



The board of directors is in session. The manager has a pile of papers in front of him, ready to be signed. And everyone is waiting, tense and awkward, for what will happen. It's plain to see: he's far too drunk to sign. And it's not the first time, either. Yet no one's ever dared to address the issue. He's the manager of the bank, after all, and if ... That too is addiction. Alcohol has this man, and all of his staff, under its control.




A smoker—it's "normal" for him to smoke twenty to thirty cigarettes a day. He's used to it, his wife is used to it, and so is his little



daughter. And she loves her daddy. His face clearly shows the signs of aging and of smoking. His skin has lost its healthy glow, his gums have receded from his teeth, and his voice always sounds hoarse. He is continually coughing and has this disease the doctor calls COPD—a chronic lung disease which obstructs breathing. Yet he keeps on smoking. His wife is concerned about his health, and his daughter has often pleaded: "Daddy, stop smoking! It causes lung cancer!" He has often resolved to do just that. But still he smokes. That too is addiction. The cigarettes are in control.



Addiction is something unfathomable. But in simple terms it means that I'm a prisoner. Sometimes I realize it, and sometimes I don't. But I'm trapped nonetheless. When I try to get free, I realize just how much of a prisoner I am.




“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?”

Romans 7:18, 24 (NIV)

Addiction does not just mean “drinking too much.” Addiction is a disease. And if I try to change I can’t. I am dependent; I am controlled by something else.

Help that really helps

In the case of alcohol



Honesty


Addiction should never be played down. In the case of alcohol, the real cause of habitual consumption is dependence on the drink—not socializing, a release from hard work, or the need to “relax.” These are mere excuses intended to distract from the true cause: the dependence on alcohol.

It is quite difficult to help an addicted person, and quite simple at the same time. Above all it requires honesty, openness, firmness, and selfless love.




Don't try to fool yourself or the person who has the alcohol problem. Make no secret of the fact that you are completely opposed to alcohol and that it is a drug. At the same time, make it perfectly clear that you value the person who has the alcohol problem.

If you like to drink or smoke yourself, then, with all due respect, you are not a suitable helper. You are continually giving the addict the message that moderate smoking or drinking does not have any consequences, when in fact nothing could be farther from the truth. Someone will eventually have to pay for your "moderate" smoking or drinking—either yourself, or the next person who may not have the will to be moderate.



Firmness

Dealing with addicts takes courage. It takes courage to allow consequences to come and to bear them. It takes the willingness to lose friends and to be hated, to appear heartless to relatives and neighbors. But the addict needs you. If he has a friend like that, he has someone he can finally rely on. And your words and actions will carry weight.



Selfless love

This is just what the addict needs—people who are prepared to put themselves on the line for him. He needs people who are firm with him for his own sake, and not just to protect themselves. People who are open for his sake, not just to vent their own feelings. He simply needs people who aren't concerned about themselves, but are really interested in him.

He was beside himself with rage. He screamed and shouted. She knew the drill. He was tall and strong, she rather slim. He had never yet become violent, but the danger was certainly there. The air was thick with tension. Then he kicked the cupboard, smashed the vase ... She somehow made it through another evening.

But the following morning was different and unexpected. Calmly, assuredly, and deliberately, she expressed her love for him. That had not changed, and he did not doubt it. And just as calmly, just as assuredly, just as deliberately, she explained that she would not accept a single repetition of such a scene. She would go—forever. And he had no doubt that she would do just that. It was the last time that a scene like that took place.

Alcoholism develops stealthily



Alcoholism can be categorized into four different phases. These describe typical stages of development.



The pre-alcoholic phase

This stage is characterized by socially acceptable drinking. Nobody thinks anything of it. Even people who do not usually drink allow themselves “a good drop” at special events. It is this omnipresence of alcohol, this public or secret commendation of it, that gives alcohol its power in society. You cannot escape it anywhere—among friends, at work, at church, at the supermarket or gas station—alcohol is always available, everywhere.

Five percent of the population will perish in this general acceptance. A further five percent are at high risk—that’s ten percent of workers, truck drivers, nurses, doctors, teachers, etc. It can hit anyone—alcohol does not discriminate.

The damage caused by this “pre-alcoholic” phase is immense. It is the great funnel which draws and traps all potential alcoholics, propelling them on to the next stage in the path of addiction.

The early phase

When does “normal” social drinking slip into the next phase? The moment I no longer drink because I am thirsty, but because of the effect alcohol has on me. That is a dangerous step, because alcohol has now become a drug for me. In order to relax in the evening, to loosen the tongue, or simply to be happy: alcohol is a prescription-free tranquilizer with serious side effects.

This early phase can last from months to years. During this time, alcohol becomes more and more important to me. I get used to it. My thoughts revolve around the drug. I talk about it; I joke about it. I can't admit that I need alcohol, but I repeatedly drink it, even when I don't want to. Then my conscience bothers me. I drink in secret.

The drinker's self-esteem diminishes. He's only his old self again when he has alcohol. Step by step he slips into the critical phase.

Some years ago I led a fasting and hiking group. It was in the fall and we were walking through the vineyards east of Stuttgart. Everyone was talkative and in a good mood. But one of the participants especially attracted my attention. He was constantly telling me about the merits of the different kinds of grapes, the beauty of wine, and how he was looking forward to “a good bottle of wine” after the fasting course was over. At first I did not suspect anything, but as time passed it became increasingly obvious. The man’s thoughts revolved around alcohol. I didn’t want to believe it. I briefly asked his wife. She nodded.



The critical phase

By now the addict is fighting. He knows very well that he has a problem with alcohol, but he is not willing to admit it. He struggles more and more, becoming more and more enslaved to the disease. Lapses of memory begin to appear. He may drink in the morning because that's when he now notices the first withdrawal symptoms. When he drinks, he excuses it by saying, "It's hot today, I have to drink something!" Or, the opposite, "It's cold today, I need to warm up." He loses his friends. He has difficulties at work. His wife leaves him. He becomes increasingly isolated.

The alcoholic repeatedly counts the costs: What is more important, alcohol or his wife? His job or "a little nip"?

At this time the alcoholic needs help. If he doesn't take up the offer at this stage, the drug will leave irrevocable traces on his body as he slips into the chronic phase.



The chronic phase

The sick person is now so changed that serious defects become permanent. Loss of memory, personality disorders, liver cirrhosis, and other psychological and physical sicknesses are the results of years of alcohol consumption.

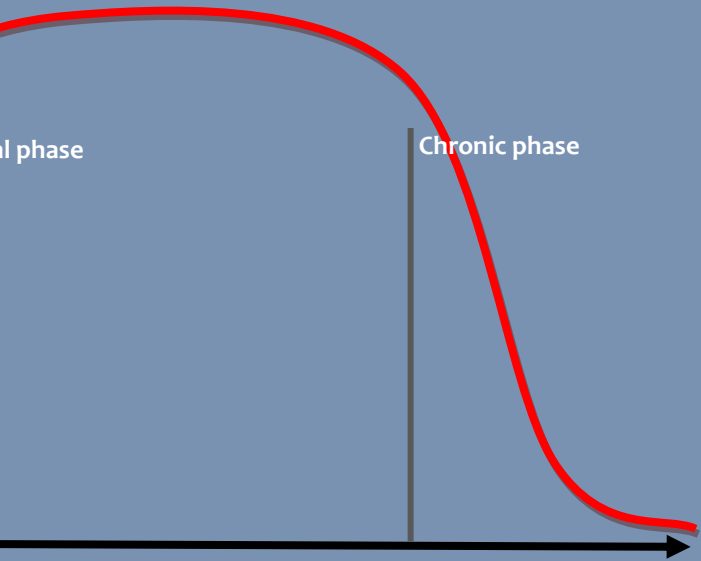
Even if an alcoholic stops drinking (because his body can no longer cope with the alcohol), often all that remains is a completely dependent person, someone who can no longer orient themselves and manage alone. They cannot function in society anymore. They have reached the lowest rung of life's ladder.



The path of



alcoholism



Deliverance

from the viewpoint of faith



Not “just chocolate”

As a child I loved to eat sweets, especially chocolate, and I often ate between meals. On some days—mostly when I was bored or had to do something that I did not like doing—I had an especially strong craving for chocolate, although I knew that it was bad for my teeth.

After finishing school I moved to another city to further my education. And this, of course,

involved studying for tests and reading books which were so dull that it was pure torture to read them. At such times I had a strong urge to eat chocolate. I could literally feel it melting on my tongue and had an irresistible desire for it. So finally I would go to the supermarket around the corner and buy a block, thinking all the time, "I will only eat one row."

But after I had eaten that one row, it was inevitably followed by a second, then a third, until finally I thought that it was not worth saving the rest and ended up eating the whole block. And on days when I found it very difficult to study, the first block was soon followed by a second.

My time as a student brought a lot of changes in my life. It was around this time that I began to believe in God and had my first experiences with Him. Despite this, my chocolate problem remained, especially during exam times. At the same time, I realized more and more that my behavior was not right. At first I justified it with the thought that it was good to eat something sweet as a source of energy when studying. But every time I ate another block of

chocolate I was plagued with an increasingly bad conscience. I started to give this problem to God in prayer; but I repeatedly fell back into my old habit.

Meanwhile I became interested in healthy food. I stopped eating meat and began to use more and more wholegrain products. One day, when I bought some items in a health food shop, I took a magazine about healthy eating home with me. But I also bought a block of chocolate immediately afterwards. While I was studying that afternoon it was not long before I had eaten it all. Then I took a short break and glanced through the health magazine. I noticed an article about chocolate and soon read about all the bad effects that can come from eating it. That was a stern rebuke for me and it pierced my heart.

I suddenly saw that although I had been praying about the matter for some time, I had never made a definite decision to stop eating chocolate. And I also realized that God would not send an angel to stop me from doing so. Right then and there I made the decision and gave the problem completely to God. I really wanted to

get free from this addiction. I confessed my lack of respect towards the body God had given me, and asked Him to cleanse me. From His Word I knew that the problem was now solved. And to this day, almost thirty years later, it has never come up again.

C. S.

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:32

That experience was “only” about chocolate— not alcohol, nicotine, or some other drug. And yet the crux of the matter is always the same:

On the one hand, I cannot free myself from a real addiction. I need God to change me.

At the same time, I need to make a real decision that I want to become free. God will not do for me what I can do for myself.

Not like that!

During a stop-smoking course I asked the participants in the introductory session what they expected from the course. One man in his mid-forties said, “That you will break me of the smoking habit.” He wanted me to make the decision to stop smoking for him. “I can support you, but you have to make the decision yourself,” I replied. After just a few meetings, this man did not want to participate any more. We can never become free like that.



A seminar with relatives



What is this all about?

In our seminar with those who are relatives of addicts, we do not complain about our miserable situation to one another. Nor do we accuse the alcoholic husband, father, or mother of being the cause of all our problems. Neither do we want to just encourage one another.

No, it is much more a matter of seeing that alcoholism and the addicted person are two separate things. The person himself is lovable; but through his alcohol consumption, through his connection with the drug, he has been changed.

The father gets violent; the mother neglects her children—and all because of this demon. Alcohol has taken possession of them and their surroundings.

It is a matter of learning to hate and renounce alcohol with all one's heart, and to simultaneously love the person concerned with the same intensity, whether it be a friend, mother, father, or spouse. But this is what we usually find so difficult to do because these two elements have become one.

It is also a matter of understanding cause and effect, and of establishing right causes and permitting consequences—even though they may be painful. We cannot simply take away the consequences of drinking.

Apart from this, it's also about practical help. How should I deal with this miserable situation? How should I react when he or she is drunk again? And how can I get out of my stereotyped role? This requires more than just counseling and giving active support, for the help needed goes beyond our ability to give: it is a matter of praying intelligently.



“They make it possible”—the problem of co-alcoholism

The family is the alcoholic’s nest. The family sticks with him, even though he’s regularly drunk, bawls out the children, or destroys the furniture.

The picture of an intact family is still kept up for outsiders. The drinking is explained away and excused. The pressing problem in the family—the alcohol—is not mentioned, but rather avoided. Under these circumstances the alcoholic can continue to drink. Whenever he’s drunk, he can sleep it off at home. There he is cared for, with no serious consequences to fear. He’s still the strongest person after all, and the others need him.



At home

Everyone knew it, but nobody said anything. From the outside, everything looked harmonious; but at home all hell broke loose. When father came home at night then everyone knew what to do. The children hid themselves, the mother tried to intercept him, slow him down, and distract him. But that only made him all the more angry. And every time they were afraid for their mother—but not one of them stood a chance against him. And in the morning mother would reassure them all again: “Your father just had a very strenuous day and needed rest.” What nonsense! Everyone knew it, but nobody dared to say the truth. And so the evil game went on and on.



Roles in the family

“My father was an alcoholic, and I married a man who drinks as well. My father used to shout, and my husband can be really aggressive when he gets drunk. But it’s still my home.”

It’s hard for us to understand, but this pattern is repeated again and again. Despite all the despair a child may go through in its threatening home situation, the road is paved for it to duplicate this same experience in later years.

Other roles are learned as well:

In order to save the family honor, peak performances are given. One child, usually the eldest, becomes the **hero**. Top marks at school,



athletic success, and social recognition characterize his development, by which he unconsciously tries to maintain the family peace. But he is constantly disappointed. He is unable to solve the real problem—the alcoholism of his father.

Then there is the **black sheep** of the family—the eternal scapegoat. This child rebels and becomes a troublemaker. His antisocial behavior is very conspicuous. Theft, gang criminality—the boy is seeking for attention just like his siblings, but he also tries to escape from home. A girl growing up in this role—usually as the second child of the family—will leave home early and seek to form a stable attachment to a man.



A third child is often withdrawn—this is the **quiet child**. It plays by itself. Early on it has learned not to oppose the family order. It lives in its own dream world, often not really discerning reality because reality is unbearable. This child is usually sick more often than the other children, and in many cases remains a bed-wetter for a long time.

The role of the family **clown** is often adopted by a latecomer. This child brings fun into the family “arena,” making everything easier to bear. At school he is the class clown as well, although his joking is often inappropriate and annoying.



All these stereotypes are roles that can be swapped. If the first child leaves the home, the black sheep of the family suddenly becomes the hero. But at the heart of all these roles lies the search for affection, and each role brings its own disappointment because all the children are forced to recognize their inability to change the home.

The way out of addiction



Addicts rarely ask for help of their own accord

The addict needs help in order to get out of his addiction. He will rarely come of his own accord and ask for help. The friend or helper needs a great amount of tact and a keen eye in order to offer help at the right moment. It's no use trying to persuade an addict against his will—he must want help.

A trustworthy helper can gain the confidence of the addict; and in fact, it is only on this basis that you can help at all.

Rock bottom

How do I know when it is the right time? I don't need to spy on the addict, nor is it necessary to count the number of empty bottles or any such thing. The alcoholic will finally bring himself to the point where he obviously needs help. He hits rock bottom.

Time, circumstances, and trust in God

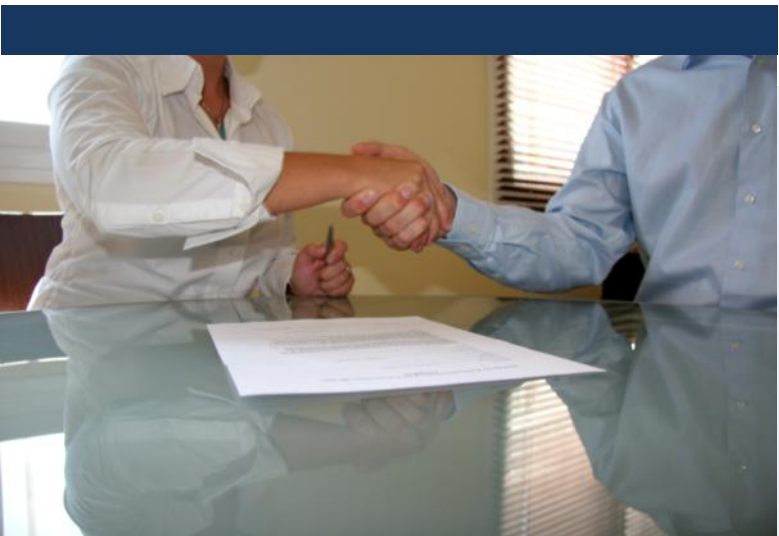
When the alcoholic hits rock bottom and feels his need of help, then that help has to be genuine, practical, and immediate. This often means a change of circumstances (environment and friends). It means taking a lot of time (in the first weeks and months, usually every day; later, less contact is necessary). And it requires trust in God, both on the part of the helper and of the alcoholic.



Making it official

When the addict hits rock bottom, he is willing to accept help, but his will is weak. Difficulties and the resultant pull of strong, negative feelings may pave the way for further crises. Therefore, after a short time for reflection, it is most important to “make it official.” The form of help should be specified in a contract that both parties sign.

What is the content of the contract? It covers financial control, place of residence, time management, contact with other people, and other important areas of life. It requires a firm resolve on the part of the one who is seeking help. And it demands 100% commitment on the part of the helper too. There will be conflicts. The time of withdrawal is hard for both parties. But it is worth the effort. The addicted person takes each forward step voluntarily—he can terminate the contract at any time. But if he does, he will have to manage without any help, and will certainly sink deeper.



Relapses are possible

There may be relapses during this time. Both the addict on his way to recovery and the helper are in danger of losing courage. But a relapse does not necessarily mean a freefall into addiction again. Immediate help, clearing up the causes, and closing doors that have been left open enable the path to restoration and health to be resumed immediately.

The stop sign: If there are increasingly frequent relapses, then that is quite often a natural stop sign.

He had stopped smoking and drinking—but help was still needed. He repeatedly needed encouragement and support. For a time he lived in our basement apartment. But he got into a rage again and demolished the door. That was the stop sign—one more incident of this kind and the therapy would be over. Today he is a healthy man: alcohol, nicotine, and angry outbursts are all things of the past.



Do you need help?

Do you want help?

Do you really want help?

Then we are happy to help!



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For further reading:

Why don't you drink?

I have often been asked this question ...

I hope that this brochure provides an answer to this question; that it removes ignorance and deception, and that it unmasks alcohol for what it is—one of the most dangerous drugs on earth!



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