

Overcoming Addiction

September 2015

THE INSIDE RUNNING

Whether it is pleasure seeking, pain avoiding or just a long-running habit, we can try to alter how we feel about our life in ways that are destructive to our health and relationships.

Addictive behaviour has never been easier to indulge in: alcohol is sold everywhere; gambling can be accessed online or at retail outlets nearby; our sexualised culture pushes free porn; dating apps are freely available, like Tinder (30% of users are married! – survey May 2015).

Porn can easily become addictive, as can anything we focus on. We estimate that half of the men you were in church with last Sunday have intentionally viewed porn in the last month. I read yesterday, "What is not focussed on God can be idolatry". Addiction is not far behind.

What we focus on we become passionate about. That is why positive habits like the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer and fellowship are so beneficial.

Don't lose focus and faith. Our lives do matter and do affect others.

With gratitude



John
John Subritzky

by Paul Monahan

At 9.00pm on a cold, moonless night in late August 1994, four strangers gathered to pray in a West Auckland church, before hitting the streets in our van. There was a lot of expectation and excitement; this was our first operational night of Drug ARM West. Drug ARM West (short for Drug Awareness & Resistance Movement) was a collection of about 20 Christians from a variety of churches who were either in recovery or had a strong family connection to addiction. This Drug ARM group, led by myself, would patrol the West Auckland and Central City streets, feeding and talking with street kids and the homeless between 11.00pm and 4.00am every Friday and Saturday night for years to come.

Apart from the Salvation Army's recovery churches, this type of street outreach is largely the Christians' response to addiction. We tend to buy into the television and media stereotype that addicts are down and out, homeless and somewhere "out there". This is actually a fallacy. All around us in our community and, yes, within your church and mine, are people addicted to all sorts of things that go largely unnoticed or unacknowledged.

So what is an addict? What do they look like? Would I recognise one if I saw one?

"Addiction is a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (e.g. alcohol, cocaine, nicotine) or engages in an activity (e.g. gambling, sex, shopping) that can be pleasurable but the continued use/act of which becomes compulsive and interferes with ordinary life responsibilities, such as work, relationships, or health. Users may not be aware that their behaviour is out of control and causing problems for themselves and others." Psychology Today

Addictive behaviour can fall onto a continuum, from obsession with a television show to full on drug use, alcoholism, gambling or pornography. Interestingly, one of the most addictive substances is refined sugar. It makes you think a little - when you have a couple of cans of Coke a day with its seven teaspoons of sugar in each, or tea with two sugars morning, noon and night. Diabetes is becoming one of the most widespread diseases in New Zealand society, stemming from an addiction we largely ignore or fail to appreciate. You know the old saying, "I just have a sweet tooth." That is what we say to others and ourselves. It introduces us to a phenomenon mentioned in the definition above, called "denial", when the users and sometimes the people around them fail to >





> acknowledge there is a problem.

The actual user may be in denial, or anonymous within the community or Church, but the signs of stress can begin to show through the family and other connections. As the Church, we can be keeping an eye out for dysfunctional behaviour and unexplained stress exhibited by family members, as this may be a sign that all is not well at home. It is possible for the family to become as emotionally sick, and in some cases sicker, than the addict. Addictive behaviour in parents, especially physical addiction to some form of chemical from nicotine to "P", will quite often manifest itself through the children first, in behaviours and comments. The financial pressure of supporting the habit may mean the children are always hungry.

If you observe this kind of stress ask, "Are you OK?" You may be surprised at the answer. If they reply "no", then work with them to find help, and support them through what will be a long process. The family can be supported without the addict necessarily even acknowledging they have a problem.

When I worked with Drug ARM we had processes to support both addicts and their families separately. Similar programmes are still available today through Alcoholics Anonymous (for addicts), Al-Anon (for families) and Community Alcohol and Drug Services (CADS). Just as the saying goes, "A child is raised by a village", addicts and their families do not recover as well without a supportive community around them.

This is an opportunity for the Church to step up and step in. "And the King will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, in so much as you did it to the least of these My brethren, you did it to me." Matthew 25:40

We are not in a place to judge, but "there but for the grace of God go I!" This was definitely so in my case; I was a problem binge drinker for over a decade. I can testify to the damage to family that addictions cause, but also to the fact that people can be set free from addictions and their families can become healthy again.

Dealing with addictions and the resulting damage has a spiritual component as much as a behavioural and physical component. Long ago Alcoholics Anonymous worked that out and built spirituality into their 12-step recovery programme.

Step 2: [We] Came to believe that a power greater than

ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3: [We] Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

This was the basis of the work we did with Drug ARM in the 1990s. It worked then and it works now! As the Church, the spiritual is our domain!

You may be saying, what has this got to do with me? I now come to the addiction epidemic that is sweeping the globe in the 21st century – pornography! If you are not involved yourself, you probably know someone who is. Or maybe you are in denial. Can you really stop viewing pornography completely anytime you like?

If the answer is "yes", then do it! If the answer is "no" - well done, you have made the first step towards recovery by admitting you have a problem! The first step to saving your marriage and family from serious harm because, as with any addiction, pornography escalates - sometimes to real life sexual encounters. You have no real idea where this could take you and your family. If this is you, tell someone you trust that you need help!

On the other hand, if someone comes to you and says, "I need help with pornography" DO NOT respond by saying, "It will be all right, you don't really have a problem!" This response could be because you want to cover up your own problem, or maybe it just plain scares you because you don't know what to do. But this person may never have the courage to admit it again. If you don't know what to do just say, "I don't know what to do, but I will help you find out." Then seek help.

"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distresses. He brought them out of the darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces." Psalm 107:13-14

Ask anyone in a 12-step recovery programme and they will tell you "it (recovery) works if you work at it". Don't let fear or shame rob you or someone you love of all that God has for you.

Addiction does not have to be the final defining statement of someone's life. Jesus came to set the captives free!

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MEN'S EVENTS 2015

GO STRONGER...
GO HIGHER...
GO FURTHER...

WELLINGTON
11-12 SEPTEMBER
AUCKLAND
2-3 OCTOBER

PROMISE
#6

A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.

Next Issue:
A DAY IN YOUR LIFE