

Addictions

Few people will dispute the claim that we live in an addictive society. But it's not just street drugs and alcohol that are addictions. It can be prescription drugs, money, spending, gambling, hobbies, food, fame, attention, work, video games, the Internet, or sex. The bottom line is that almost anything you can enjoy can also become an addiction. And when you're addicted, nothing else matters as much as getting your next fix. The compulsive nature of addictions becomes all-consuming and eclipses any meaningful relationships with family or friends. The end result is an ever-deepening isolation and eventual self-destruction.

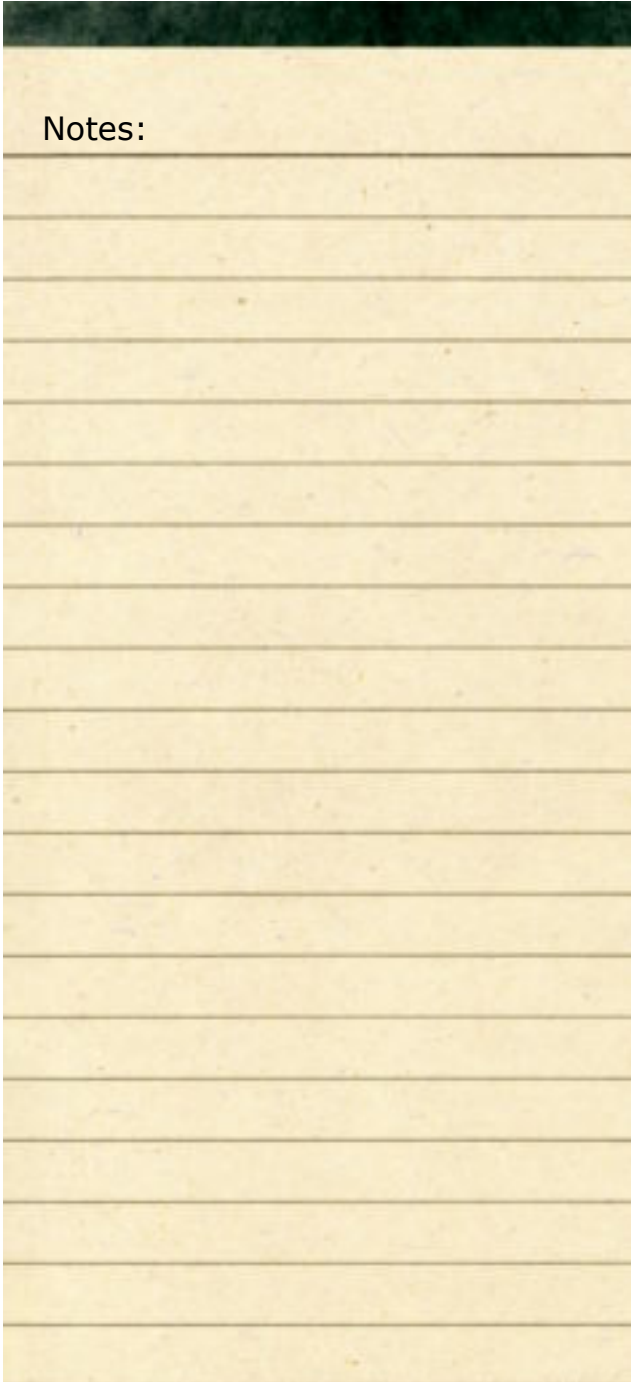
How did we get here?

Over the last several decades, we have been targeted with a media blitzkrieg of advertisements selling us the unrealistic expectation that we deserve to be happy, forever young, and continuously fulfilled at all times. Individual personal fulfillment is touted as the ultimate goal of life. And that message dovetails with our inborn determination to make our lives work on our own without any kind of dependence upon the God who made us. What was once a wish and a desire has morphed into an insatiable demand for more without regard for the cost or the consequences. The cost is our freedom to choose, because it feels like we just can't stop no matter how hard we try. And the consequences are an overwhelming avalanche of shame and self-contempt.

So what can we do to turn back the tide of addictions that feel like they are beyond our ability to control, much less stop?

Here's where a healthy church can help. I know that some of you are probably saying, "The church is the last place I'd look for help with my addiction." And part of me would agree with you. Unfortunately, the church is known in many circles for being

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judgmental and unwelcoming towards those who struggle with addictions. “Get a life” and “Just stop it” are some of the ways that Christians have responded to pleas for help.

But that’s not the way that Jesus handled those caught in the grip of addictive struggles. Instead, He invited those who were in despair and being crushed by an overwhelming burden of shame, contempt, fear, and guilt to come to Him so that He could provide rest for their weary souls (Matt. 11:28). Healthy churches are communities where struggling is expected and believers are equipped to struggle well together. This is where people really listen. They are available and approachable. Strugglers feel at home because the church is a place to belong, and then to believe. And that belief builds a solid foundation for transformational living.

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