
Loving Them to Recovery

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2

ESTIMATES SUGGEST THAT NEARLY 30% OF AMERICANS WILL STRUGGLE WITH A DRUG OR ALCOHOL PROBLEM IN THEIR LIFETIME. According to some experts, the total number is approximately 40 million Americans or 1 out of every 7¹. This is more than the number of people currently being treated for heart disease, diabetes, or even cancer. But this is really only part of the story as addiction's tentacles reach well beyond those actively participating in drug or alcohol abuse. The fact of the matter is that every addict is a husband, wife, father, mother, son, or daughter. Therefore, those who have a loved one involved in addiction also suffer at the hands of this enemy and need just as much love, support, and education as the addicts themselves. I would contend that most of us know someone who drinks too much, abuses drugs (legal or illegal), smokes regularly, eats excessively, gambles to the point of financial hardship, or has given into pornography's seduction.

Fortunately, there are tools available to Christians in this situation. There is hope because God has not left his children alone to solve this problem alone. The bible provides direction and God has established His Church as a fountain of strength and support. This journey will require great patience, faith, prayer to complete successfully. You will also need discernment as you seek biblical counsel and the support from mature Christian brothers and sisters. Most of all, you will have to trust in the Lord because He is your strength and shield in the midst of this storm:

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. (Psalm 28:7)

God's message to his children is one of comfort. Rest assured, you are not walking this journey alone even though it may feel like it at times. God is with you every step of the way and has provided you with the tools to be successful in every situation. At the end of this journey you will find that your faith is strengthened and relationships renewed, but you must be patient and steadfast for the Lord does not

¹ Statistics taken from [CASA Columbia](#) on February 23, 2014.

always work in our timing. Sanctification is a process that takes time to complete (just ask Job!). My prayer is that these scriptures and words will be a source of wisdom to help guide your steps.

I don't want to trivialize the effort involved. It will not be easy. Your persistence, however, will prevail because God is on your side. Remaining steadfast is the message Christ offered in the *Parable of the Persistent Widow* in Luke Chapter 8 and it is appropriate in dealing with addiction:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

The first line of this parable is the key, "...always pray and not give up." The widow's persistence is commended by Christ. She is relentless and you should be too. Continue to offer your pleas for justice to the Lord as you fight this adversary.

I can relate to this parable on a personal level. When I was young, my mother prayed ceaselessly for my salvation. I often heard her crying to the Lord in the room next door as she interceded on my behalf. Her tears of concern did not fall on deaf ears as God changed my life in a powerful way (according to his will and divine prerogative). But the change did not happen overnight nor was His answer swift in our human understanding of "swiftness."

God hears your prayers. This is perhaps the greatest weapon you have in this battle. There will be times when you do not know what to pray for because you are tired, broken, and weak. That is okay. God has made an allowance for that as well. It is for this reason that He sent His Spirit into our hearts. The Spirit searches all things and knows what we need exactly at the right time:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26:27)

Trust in the Lord always. Know that your prayerful persistence is an expression of your faith in God's power as you recognize His providential hand of Grace, "*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*" (Hebrews 11:6).

The author of Hebrews notes that a trusting faith is essential to a vibrant Christian life. Your faith will compel you to wait on the Lord as seek his will in prayer. The “waiting” is perhaps the most difficult part of this struggle. We often want to “help” God along and may try to take matters into our own hands and use our human reasoning to solve problems in our lives. We may even want to “fix” those around us and do so in our own strength. We can learn from Sarah’s example in Genesis 16. She offered Hagar to Abraham so that God’s promise would be fulfilled. Despite Sarah’s meddling in God’s plan, He worked through her sin (and Abraham’s) and His promise was ultimately fulfilled. Our lesson from this example is that God always works in the lives of those who have been called according to His will and purpose:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

We may think that all good things are from God and hard times come from somewhere or someone else – like Satan. There is really no struggle between “good and evil” because God is sovereign and the Lord of all. It is important to understand that God works in the “good” times and the “bad” times. Even when there are evil intentions involved, God always accomplishes his just end! This is the lesson Joseph learned through the many twists and turns he faced in his life. His brothers intended to kill him, but through his ordeal he responded with great wisdom and faith as he recognized God’s mighty hand:

*When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept. His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, **but God intended it for good** to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:15-21; emphasis added)*

What a wonderful picture of spiritual maturity exhibited in this passage by Joseph. Although he could have repaid his brothers for their evil intent, Joseph did not use his position of authority to retaliate. In fact, he rhetorically asked, “Am I in the place of God?” Joseph recognized that he was not in the place of God “to repay evil for evil.” This is also true for every Christian when confronted by evil. It is not our position, as followers of Christ, to judge or condemn sinners. After all, if Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save it through his sacrifice on the Cross.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)

Since Christ came in love, we should be like minded and just as fervent in our expression of love. I remind myself daily that I am in no position to “cast the first stone” because I am desperate sinner in need of God’s outpouring of grace. I have been commanded to love in all circumstances with great patience and compassion. This can be a tough task, which is why I refer to it as “tough love.” Yes, it requires great strength to love those that are tough to love – like a family member who is straining family and personal

relationships to the breaking point because of drug use. They have made a choice and the repercussions of that sinful choice can be dramatic. It may be tempting to repay evil with evil. This, however, is not the standard we have been called to as followers of Christ:

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. (Matt. 5:38,39)

Furthermore...

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^[1] and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your father in heaven. (Matt. 5:43,44)

Jesus was teaching his audience the true meaning of love. This was spoken to an audience hiding behind the law and Jesus saw through their deception. He wanted them to understand that it is always preferable to consider others above ourselves. I adamantly contend that this is the true definition of "tough love," which Paul described in his epistle to the church in Philippi:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Phil. 2:1-4)

The idea that we need be "tough" with an addict according to principles of this world is foreign to the biblical teaching of love and humility. It is born of ungodly principles and a misunderstanding of grace and Christian compassion. Sadly, those who practice what they believe is "tough love" will never experience God's grace until they show grace to those around them. Yes, it is important to recognize that addiction is a sin, but also know that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

The sin of addiction is not an excuse to judge others who have missed the mark. All of us have, which is why we were enemies of God at one time, "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:3 ESV). Keep in mind that those who judge will be judged by the same standard they use. This is the lesson Christ taught in Matthew 7:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Christ's teaching in this regard did not go over well with his audience, especially the Pharisees who were fond of picking the speck from their brother's eye. Christ rightly rebuked their hypocrisy and reminded them that judging sin is God's purview. This message is just as true today as in the time of Christ. It is instructive to everyone who ministers to a loved one struggling with addiction. We certainly do not excuse addiction, because it is clearly a sin. We offer prayer, encouragement, and support for those ensnared in this sin. Most of all, everything we do must come from a heart of love and compassion:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Yes, you may need to set boundaries and protect yourself from the lying or violence that may accompany addiction. If your husband, for example, is abusive when he drinks and there is a concern for yours or your children's safety, then it may be necessary to leave the house or make other arrangements. Exercise wisdom and sound judgment, which is compatible with the spirit of love. It is humility that God seeks as you become united with Christ through this ordeal. You are in the process of being refined by the fire as you wait on the Lord:

But those who wait on the LORD, Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:31)

Part of that waiting may be done alone, away from the loved one who is causing the pain and suffering as he or she practices sin. Your decision to separate or distance yourself will need to be made wisely. Here is where wisdom and discernment play an important role in the battle. You recognize that you love God's holiness as much as you love the person living in sin. You cannot compromise honor, integrity, and justice for the sake of a loved-one's actions. They are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, Christ rebuked the crowd for bringing the prostitute before him, but he also corrected the woman when he said, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

The words that you say and how you act are a reflection of your biblical maturity. There are times when a hug is needed and other times when exhortation is the right course of action. Every situation is different and the "one size fits all" simply doesn't work. This is why it is important to grow and learn so you can exercise wisdom in your particular situation. Avail yourself of A.R.M. resources and study the bible intently.

This is where a trusted, mature Christian friend and mentor can help. I know it is difficult to reach out because addiction is very personal. Please note that it is important to maintain the trust of the loved one you are trying to help. Publicly exposing the intimate details of his or her life betrays that trust and will make it more difficult to help. Despite this warning, we are called into fellowship with the family of Christ because iron sharpens iron. We are part of what Paul calls the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12). A one member suffers, so does the entire body. Therefore, seek those friendships that encourage and instruct you in sound biblical doctrine so you will be whole and can help your loved one recover.

The devil would like us to be separated from other brothers and sisters because he knows that there is strength in numbers. So he uses guilt and shame to divide and conquer. Like a soldier that is cut-off from his battalion, a splintered Christian body is easy prey for the devil: *"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8)

Having said this, discernment is very important whenever we lay our lives bare before the eyes of others. Some may judge or gossip and others may provide unbiblical counsel by instructing the seeker to follow principles of worldly psychology. They will tell you that addiction is a disease and therapy and treatment are the best options for your situation. This may even come directly from the pulpit so be careful of any advice that is contrary to sound, Christian teaching. And certainly rebuke anything that compromises the gospel message.

You may be inclined to recommend a recovery program of one kind or another because that is what we have been told to do. But what good is a program that teaches the addict to only manage his or her addiction? Who wants to live with addiction for the rest of their life? The gospel is different from recovery programs that only teach management techniques. God offers permanent solutions to life's problems -- including addiction. He doesn't just give us strategies to manage sin; rather, he gives us victory over it!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:17)

Those born of the Spirit have been set free from sin (Romans 6:6). It is God's job to save, but you may be called on to remind your loved one that God truly has removed the chains of bondage. This is the beauty of the Cross and the true message of the gospel. The "good news" is that we are no longer slaves to sin because Christ has rescued us from this body of death (Romans 7).

There are countless recover groups available for addicts, but few are designed to help those who have a loved one struggling with addiction. People helping people often need love and support as well. If you have a group in your church that supports people in this situation, please contact us and share your story. Others may benefit from what you've done. We would also like to post your ministry on our website for others who may be looking for support in your area. You can send an email to info@AddictionRecoveryMinistry.org.

This point cannot be overstated: The gospel is truly enough to transform every person's life regardless of his or her circumstance. All things are truly possible with God (Matt. 19:26). Fortunately, we don't need to add to the gospel message. A person can overcome all sin through God's grace by faith in His Son.

Let me share a personal story of a time I ministered to a dear brother and friend who struggled many years with addiction. It was destroying his life and tearing his family apart. He felt hopeless because he believed the lie that he had a lifelong illness. He went to numerous programs in the church and the lie that he had a disease was reinforced by well-meaning Christians; even leaders and pastors. They too believed the popular lie that addiction is a disease.

When I showed him biblical evidence that he was no longer a prisoner of sin, it was as if a veil dropped from his eyes. His life was immediately transformed as his eyes were opened to the glorious truth of his

new nature in Christ. He embraced the reality that he had truly been set free from his past. His situation is not uncommon. A Christian may not fully realize what has been given them through Christ's death. It's like a prisoner who remains in his prison quarters even though the door has been opened and his freedom granted.

This is the glorious truth of God's power. We have been set free by God's grace and no longer slaves (or prisoners) to sin. God doesn't just set us free, however. He helps us in our daily struggles and gives victory as we work out our salvation with fear trembling. According to Saint Peter, God has given us everything needed for life and godliness:

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. (1 Peter 1:3)

I am humbled to be an instrument God uses in this fight. I have witnessed God's power in setting captives free without treatment, steps, medication, or therapy. I am convinced that God can use you as well in the life of a loved one fighting this battle. Arm yourself with the truth, because that is the best weapon against the lies of this world. Christ's words in John 8:32 are just as appropriate today as when they were first spoken: "*Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*" Make sure the words and instruction you give are true or they will only encourage defeat and continued bondage.

There is more to your influence than words. How you act speaks much more loudly than what you say. This is especially true for parents who lecture their kids about drugs and alcohol. I have spoken to many young people who tell me that their parent's words and actions do not line up. They are told that drinking is bad, yet their parents drink every night and justify their actions because they are adults. It is no wonder why children don't listen to us! We practice the very thing we condemn.

This is truly tragic and frankly inexcusable. Let your light shine brightly before all men -- especially those in your life. You may need to make many sacrifices as you love him or her to victory. I am not advocating some new form of *Temperance*. I get it. The bible doesn't condemn drinking. Christ's first miracle was turning water into wine. The bible may not condemn drinking, but it does ask us to consider the needs of others above our own wants and desires. That may mean removing alcohol from the house or abstaining altogether, even if you don't have a problem with it:

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. (Romans 14:20,21)

This goes for other things that may cause your brother to stumble. Granted, we are "free in Christ" but we must never use that freedom as a license to cause others to sin. With great freedom comes even greater responsibility. Look to the Cross to understand what is truly required to live as Christ lived in humility and grace.

Lastly, and this is difficult to say, you may need to allow your loved one to experience the painful consequences of his or her decision to drink or abuse drugs. The gospel is only “good news” for those that have “bad news” to contend with. Covering for an addict’s sin also “covers” the reality of the problem. This is the primary reason of our published worksheets available on our website. My hope is that the worksheets would help people struggling with addiction to recognize and understand the severity of their plight. The “Counting the Costs” worksheet (available at [ARM Resources](#)) is a tool he or she can use.

This is extremely difficult for parents, but it is God who heals and restores through this crisis. It is natural to protect our young ones from pain and suffering. However, pain may lead to godly sorrow, which leads to a heart that is open to the gospel:

For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Cor. 7:9b,10)

While it is true that sorrow is an important part of repentance, it is necessary to move beyond sorrow in order to experience healing and restoration. This is where you can help. Do not allow the addict to feel overwhelmed by sorrow or he or she may be completely defeated. Discipline is important, provided it leads a person to repentance through love. This is the exhortation Paul gave to the Corinthian body of believers:

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Cor. 2:5-8)

Do not compound the sinners sorrow by adding your own judgment and condemnation. The ultimate goal is forgiveness and love as God works on your loved one’s heart.