

Basic Counseling Principles, Procedures & Strategies for Counseling Addictions

Keith Palmer

A. Prerequisites:¹

1. Biblical view of addiction
2. Biblical anthropology (worship, desires, the heart)
3. Biblical psychosomatics (the body and the heart)
4. Addiction and the gospel (Rom. 6)
5. Understanding a basic biblical counseling principles (Gather data, build involvement, analyze the problem, etc.)

B. Deal with two _____ of addiction:²

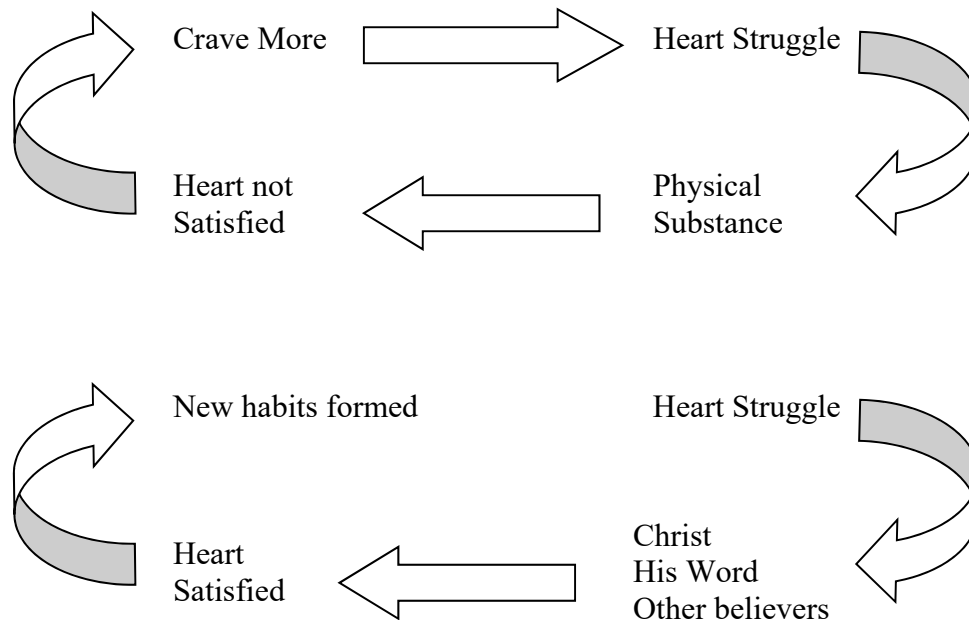
1. _____ “addiction”
 - a. Slavery to some physical substance (drugs, alcohol, etc.) – a foreign substance is introduced into the body
 - b. Slavery to some pleasurable activity that brings a physiological reward (pornography, video games, gambling, etc) – the substance is within the body already
2. _____ “addiction” – the god-replacement ruling the heart
 - a. What are the desires of the heart? (“lusts of flesh” – Eph. 2:3)
 - b. What are the lies being embraced? (2 Cor. 10:5, James 1:14-16, Eph. 4:22)
 - c. What are the habits that have formed? (Eph. 4:22-24)

¹ For review of these preliminary topics, see Keith Palmer, “Addictions” Parts 1-4, available at: gbcgranbury.com/addictionclasses

² Paul Tripp, “Addictions Counseling” Faith Baptist Church, 2008.

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C. Data gathering

1. External factors (family, job, finances, relationships, etc.)
2. Internal factors
 - a. What is he thinking? What is he wanting?
 - b. Common factors:³
 - i. Inaccurate view of self
 - ii. Avoidance of conflicts or trials
 - iii. Lack of trust in God
 - iv. "Perfectionistic" tendencies
 - v. Desires a "quick fix"
 - vi. Motivated by fear
 - vii. Patterns and habits
 - viii. Peer pressure
 - ix. Triggers

D. Radical _____ (Matt. 5:29-30)

1. If the substance is a medication, illegal drug, or alcohol, then a physician should likely be involved.

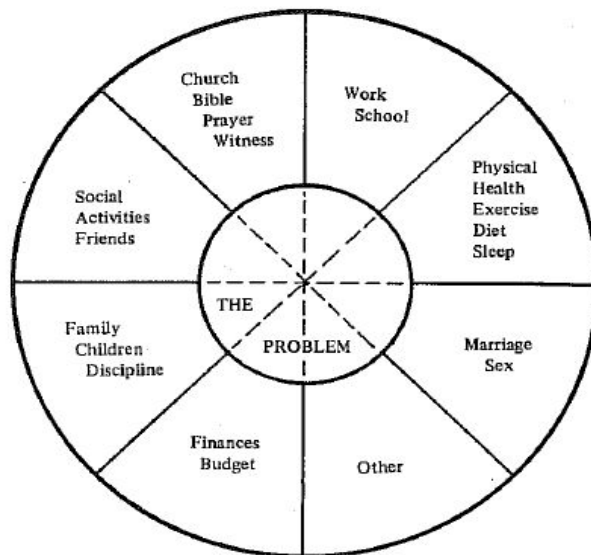
³ Stuart Scott, *Advanced Biblical Counseling*, The Master's Seminary, 1999.

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2. If the behavior has significant physical or medical factors, then a physician should likely be involved (e.g., anorexia, cutting, etc.).
3. Radical amputation should include all factors related to the “addiction” – behavior, substances, relationships, influences, locations, etc.

E. Total life re-structuring:⁴



1. “...means looking at the problem in relationship to all areas of life” – Jay Adams
2. “...and contributes toward the solution: Structure often is essential for effecting the twofold change that we are discussing. Structure helps both in putting off and in putting on. When a counselee prays in faith for change, his faith should extend to works that are consistent with his prayer. If he prays for deliverance from a smoking habit, he should stop buying cigarettes. If he wants to overcome an impure thought life, he must burn the girlie magazines. If he wishes to get rid of a bad temper, he should abandon the company of others with a similar problem (Proverbs 14:7; 22:24, 25). Thus the structure of one’s activities, surroundings, and associations should be consistent with and aid his avowed desire to put off a sinful practice. Equally important, since change is two-factored, he must structure for the new practice that he wishes to develop.” – Jay Adams⁵

⁴ Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Zondervan, 1970), 156.

⁵ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual* (Zondervan, 1973), 195.

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3. What items need to be “put off”?
4. What items need to be “put on”?
5. In what other ways should the counselee’s life be structured for godliness?

F. The “_____” in addiction (James 1, 4)

1. What are the ruling desires?
2. What lies have been embraced?
3. What patterns have been developed?

G. _____ deceit and lying

1. Deceit and lying _____ accompanies addictions.
2. The counselee must _____ of all forms of lying and learn to speak the truth (Eph. 4:15, 25).
3. _____ needs to be earned and rebuilt.
4. A commitment to comprehensive _____ is essential.
5. Areas to look out for:⁶
 - a. Hiding
 - b. Sneaking
 - c. Blaming
 - d. Manipulating
 - e. Avoiding
 - f. Being silent as a way of avoiding
 - g. Changing the subject
 - h. Rationalizing
 - i. Giving your word but not doing it

⁶ Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (P&R), 185-86.

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H. Deal with _____:

1. Relationships that need to end (Matt. 5:29-30).
2. Relationships that need to begin (Eph. 4).
3. Relationships that need repair (spouse, children, boss, etc. – additional counseling?).
4. Relationships that have been replaced by the addiction.
5. The most important relationship (Deut. 6:4-5, Col. 1:18)
6. Relational challenges:⁷
 - a. Cooperative denial – addictions only live if everyone denies it.
 - b. Social protection – cover for addict externally (skilled at casual relationships)
 - c. Responsibility shift – role reversal (children parenting parents)
 - d. Rescuer roles – take responsibility for keeping addict “safe”
 - e. Role confusion – clarity of lines of authority are blurred.

I. Address _____ matters.

J. Deal with other _____ issues related to the “addiction”:

1. Marriage issues
2. Parenting issues
3. Heart issues: guilt, anger, fear, worry, anxiety, shame, loneliness, doubt, pleasure, failure, discouragement, grief, pleasure, etc.
4. Vocation or ministry implications

K. Craft a _____ plan:

1. Confession – agreement with God about the nature of the sin and what it deserves. Confession to God (1 John 1:9) and others (Luke 17:3).
2. Immediate, comprehensive, radical amputation. A commitment to total abstinence (Prov. 28:13).
3. If a substance is involved, a commitment to work with a physician should be considered.

⁷ Paul Tripp, “Addictions Counseling” Faith Baptist Church, 2008.

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4. Intentional time in the Word:
 - a. The gospel and identity in Christ (Rom. 6).
 - b. Directed study regarding both the “symptom” and “causal” addiction.
 - c. Additional study designed to renew the mind in appropriate topics.
 - d. How to view the body (1 Cor. 6)
 5. Small group discipleship.
 6. Regular intensive discipleship (biblical counseling).
 7. Ministry in serving others.
 8. Titus 2 mentor/discipler/accountability person
- L. Craft a temptation plan:
1. Get to a “safe” place
 2. Pray for help
 3. Call accountability person
 4. Immerse in the Word until desires change

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APPENDIX - *Counseling Those Addicted to Alcohol or Drugs*

A. The Bible and alcohol

1. Alcohol is the “paradigmatic” addiction in Scripture. It serves as the main example of addiction that informs our theology of all others
2. Key texts:
 - a. Gen. 9:20ff
 - b. Deut. 21:18-20
 - c. Prov. 20:1
 - d. Prov. 23:20-21
 - e. Prov. 23:29-35
 - f. Prov. 31:4-5
 - g. Is. 5:11-12
 - h. Is. 28:7-8
 - i. 1 Cor. 5:11
 - j. 1 Cor. 6:10
 - k. 1 Cor. 11:21
 - l. Eph. 5:18
 - m. 1 Thes. 5:7
3. The Bible clearly teaches that drunkenness is sin (Eph. 5:18). The one whose life is characterized by habitual drunkenness is not a believer and will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10)
4. Scripture teaches that alcohol is associated with other sins and negative consequences: (See Penny Orr, “Counseling Women with Addictions,” in *Women Helping Women*, eds. Elyse Fitzpatrick & Carol Cornish (Harvest House, 1997), 372.
 - a. Sorrow
 - b. Discontentment
 - c. Lack of wisdom
 - d. Forgetfulness
 - e. Laziness, lacks motivation
 - f. Financial trouble
 - g. Stubbornness
 - h. Poor judgment
 - i. Delusions
 - j. Hallucinations
 - k. Suspiciousness
 - l. Lying
 - m. Pursuit of pleasure and entertainment

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- n. Irresponsible lifestyle, neglects good nutrition, rest, and exercise
 - o. Poor physical appearance, bloodshot eyes, disheveled, weight loss or gain
 - p. Long-term physical impairment
 - q. Contentions and arguments, strained or broken relationships
 - r. Withdrawal from others
 - s. Mistreatment and abuse of others
 - t. Disrespect of authority (God, civil, parental, employer), or law-breaking
 - u. Rebellion, passive indifference or open hostility
 - v. Disregard for punishment and the natural consequences of wrong behavior
 - w. Endangerment of self and others
 - x. Lack of concern for the things of the Lord
 - y. Sexual sin or inappropriate behavior (Gen. 9:21)
 - z. Violence and fighting (Prov. 20:1)
5. Scripture reveals that alcohol can produce a temporary, pleasurable experience but that it ultimately cannot satisfy (Ecc. 2:3)
6. The Bible warns us about associating with those who are drunkards (Prov. 23:20-21), lest we learn their ways and experience negative consequences
7. There is hope for the one enslaved to alcohol through the Person and work of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11)
- B. Build a relationship (involvement) (Prov. 27:6)
- C. Data gathering
- 1. Family history
 - 2. Spiritual condition – Counseling will become evangelism if salvation is in question
 - 3. Significant events and relationships
 - 4. Current situation (see Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 156).
 - 5. Questions about the use of alcohol:
 - a. When did use begin?
 - b. What are the circumstances surrounding the use of alcohol?
 - c. What typically happens?
 - d. What are you thinking at the time?
 - e. What are you feeling?
 - f. How do you handle your feelings?
 - g. What are you trying to accomplish?

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- h. When do you do it?
 - i. Where do you do it?
 - j. Where do you get the alcohol?
 - k. Who are you with when you do it?
 - l. Who knows about it?
6. Identify rituals and patterns. Using a journal may be helpful
7. Expect to get the truth in “layers.” Rarely is a counselee struggling with “addictions” forthright and honest about everything during the first meeting. Solicit the counselee’s permission to speak with others to verify information (spouse, adult children, good friends, etc.)

D. Root & fruit issues

- 1. Alcohol is the “overt” idol or substance (“symptom addiction”)
- 2. However, the “covert” idolatry or “causal addiction” must be uncovered:
 - a. Drinking to relieve stress or relax
 - b. Drinking to dull unpleasant emotions (loneliness, fear, grief, rejection, failure, guilt, anger, worry/anxiety, etc.)
 - c. Drinking as part of the culture or social gatherings
 - d. Drinking because of peer-pressure, “fear of man,” or to gain acceptance
 - e. Drinking to avoid responsibility
 - f. Drinking because of taste
 - g. Drinking to escape difficult circumstances
 - h. Drinking because it is pleasurable in some other way
- 3. Patterns learned through data gathering (#2 above) can help to reveal heart issues

E. Counseling procedure

- 1. What is the goal? Not just sobriety, but the glory of God as revealed in growing, maturing, Christ-like character (1 Cor. 10:31, 2 Cor. 3:18, 5:9)
- 2. Help the counselee to turn away from alcohol (Matt. 5:29-30). Inaccessibility leading to total abstinence is the goal
 - a. Remove alcohol from the home
 - b. Sever relationships with drinking friends
 - c. Change habits (restaurants, bars, hangouts, sporting events, etc.)
 - d. Change everything that reminds, triggers, or tempts the person toward alcohol

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3. Solicit a commitment to honesty and transparency (Eph. 4:25). Train the counselee in how to be honest.
 4. Employ intentionally intrusive accountability – Counselee must be committed to this to be effective
 - a. Schedule
 - b. People
 - c. Finances
 - d. Any involvement with alcohol
 5. Teach the counselee to view his “addiction” biblically (previous notes)
 - a. Heart idolatry must be repented of and replaced (1 Thes. 1:9)
 - i. What are the governing desires?
 - ii. What are the lies being embrace?
 - b. Instill identity in Christ (Rom. 6, cf. 1 Cor. 6:11-12). Explain spiritual resources a believer enjoys to grow and change in Christ
 - c. Disciple and teach how to have a growing walk with God (spiritual disciplines, etc.). Help them to discover and grow in satisfaction and joy in God (Ps. 16:11, Ps. 34:8)
- “Error an delusions can never prevail so long as the remembrance of God is rooted in our hearts” – John Calvin
- d. Teach how the Bible reveals a superior way to deal with the relevant heart issues (guilt, worry, failure, etc.)
 6. Call the counselee to repentance. Repentance is a change of mind leading to a change of direction in life and a change in behavior. Employ biblical replacement (Eph. 4:22-24)
 7. Craft a “temptation plan” (1 Cor. 10:13)
 8. Help the counselee to restructure his life so that it promotes godliness, not sin (1 Tim. 4:7b). What other areas do the same heart issues manifest themselves?

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9. Mobilize the church – “Addiction lives best in isolation. The solution involves community” – Paul Tripp (Eph. 5:11-13)
 - a. A godly, mature friend of the same gender to help, pray, encourage, and help with accountability (its usual better if the spouse is not the main “policeman”)
 - b. A godly, mature friend of the same gender to minister to the counselee’s spouse (if married)
 - c. A small group who can pray and encourage
 - d. A lead pastor or counselor who can minister formal biblical counseling and manage others involved
10. Address relationship issues
 - a. Confession and forgiveness
 - b. Being transparent and honest
 - c. Rebuilding broken trust

F. How to help the spouse

1. Believing spouse married to an unbeliever who is a drunkard (1 Pet. 3:1-6)
 - a. This situation is likely an example of “true suffering” and a call and opportunity to follow Christ’s example (1 Pet. 2:20-23)
 - b. A believing spouse has a huge opportunity to influence her husband through her own example of godliness and her faithfulness to her biblical role (1 Pet. 3:1)
 - c. Her godly, gracious, edifying words though sometimes needed, are not her main tool of influence (1 Pet. 3:1, cf. Eph. 4:29, Prov. 31:26)
 - d. A wife’s purity and respectful attitude are essential (1 Pet. 3:2). Particularly with respect, a wife should take care to:
 - i. Show him respect in words and actions
 - ii. Speak about him with respect, especially to children, family, and friends
 - iii. Respect the role God has given him even though he may not be a believer or acting in a Christ-like way
 - e. God is honored and a husband is influenced by a believing wife’s emphasis on internal godliness (gentle and quiet spirit), not just external adornment (1 Pet. 3:3)
 - f. A believing wife should be submissive to her unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:4) unless he specifically asks her to sin (cf. Acts 5:29)
2. A believer with a Christian spouse struggling with “addiction”

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3. Resources for the wife's protection (Lou Priolo, "Resources for the Wife's Protection, NANC conference 1994; Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife* (Focus, 1999), 137-173 – chapters 13-14).
 - a. Ultimately, she is to trust God and cling to Him as her refuge (Ps. 46:1).
 - b. Biblical submission (1 Pet. 2:13-3:6).
 - c. Biblical communication (Eph. 4:25-32, Prov. 12:6, 16:21).
 - d. Follow God's plan for "overcoming evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21).
 - e. Biblical appeal (Prov. 16:21).
 - f. Biblical reproof (Luke 17:3).
 - g. Wise response to foolish demands (Prov. 26:4-5).
 - h. Seek godly counsel (Prov. 24:6).
 - i. Utilize the church, including church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17, Gal. 6:1-2).
 - j. Utilize the civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-6).

II. Counseling those "addicted" to drugs

A. Counseling those doing drugs will basically follow the same major points, principles, and procedures as those listed above with alcohol. However, there are some additional points that are unique to drug abuse

B. Three main types of drug abuse

1. Illegal drugs
 - a. Marijuana
 - b. Ecstasy
 - c. Hallucinogens (PCP, LSD)
 - d. Opiates (heroin)
 - e. Steroids
 - f. Stimulants (cocaine, methamphetamines)
2. Prescription drugs
 - a. Opiates (morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone)
 - b. Stimulants (methylphenidate - Ritalin)
 - c. Sedatives (benzodiazepines – Valium, Xanax)
3. Common products
 - a. Inhalants (solvents, paints, fuels, glues)
 - b. Nicotine products (cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco)

C. Terminology

1. Tolerance – repeated exposure to the drug results in diminishing effect.
2. Dependence – a person needs the drug in order to "feel normal."
3. Withdrawal – unpleasant symptoms that occur when the body readjusts to the absence of a drug.

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D. Involving a physician or detox facility

1. Many drugs have more significant withdrawal effects than alcohol and some involve dangerous hallucinations or other psychotic issues. Some of these symptoms can continue even after use is discontinued. Further, some drugs have more potential for long-lasting or even permanent body damage.
2. Some individuals who become addicted to prescription medications have medical conditions (cancer, chronic pain issues, back problems, etc.). A solid, preferably Christian physician is needed to help with the medical condition while being wise so that treatment does not unnecessarily contribute to the addiction.

E. Potential civil or criminal issues

1. The use of illegal drugs and abuse of prescription medications are illegal practices. Unlike alcohol and nicotine, there are potential civil or criminal charges which may arise if a person is caught using or possessing drugs or drug paraphernalia
2. Believers are called to honor and obey governing authorities (Rom. 13)
3. Most countries do not require citizens to report drug use to civil authorities, although it may be recommended.
4. There may be cases when informing civil authorities is appropriate and even prudent to protect the user, a spouse, children, or others from harm or danger.
5. God establishes human government to uphold what is righteous and condemn what is unrighteous, protecting those who do what is right and punishing those who do wrong (Rom. 13:1-4)

F. Sources and availability

1. Unlike alcohol, a legal product available for purchase by those above a certain age, illicit drugs must be acquired illegally and secretly.
2. With prescription drugs, websites and prescribing physicians must be addressed.
3. Identifying and cutting off the source of drugs is a key component for helping those who are struggling with drug use (Matt. 5:29-30)

G. Ministering to family

1. Often cases of care with drug abuse involve helping a family member whose child or spouse is addicted to drugs.
2. The church can minister to families of those struggle with drug abuse through:
 - a. Formal counseling
 - b. Biblical friendship and encouragement
 - c. Prayer support
 - d. Practical help (babysitting, help with housework, etc.)

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