**Addiction: Disease of Personal Choice?**  
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**Introduction to the topic:** Addiction is a term used to describe anything from a desire, to a medical issue, to an uncontrollable compulsion. Addictions are complex. Of all the intricate layers that make up addiction, one thing is certain; no one plans on becoming addicted. Addictions are very wide ranging, and include alcohol, drugs, sex, video games, food, pornography, and gambling. At the very beginning of addiction development, these activities provide a temporary and fleeting solution to the individual’s problems. However, there is some debate as to what actually “causes” people to become addicted. The answer to this debate has a very real application to today’s medical field and addiction counselling workers. Some view addiction as a disease. Others view addiction as the result of choice. Others view it as the playing out of genetic predispositions. Still others view it as the result of upbringing and environment. In my opinion, addiction is not a disease that is acquired or a sad example of social victimization, but rather, it is the very unfortunate consequence of repeated poor personal choice. **In order to be properly understood and helped both medically and psychologically, individuals suffering with addictions should no longer be viewed as people who have diseases, but as people who—due to some unfortunate life situations, choices, or upbringings—have decided to find temporary fulfillment through arguably dangerous substances or lifestyles which, in the end, master them.**

**Summary of scientific aspects of the topic:**  
 Addiction to a certain substance or lifestyle gives rise to dependence. Psychological dependence is the term used when a person feels the need to have a hit (or a drink, or a sexual encounter etc. – whatever the addiction may be). Psychological dependence is very serious, and is the main driver in almost all addictions. Many addicts only experience psychological dependence, especially addictions involving sex, food, gambling, pornography, and video games. Physical dependence is the term used to describe the situation where the body has developed tolerance to a certain drug, and without more and more exposure, withdrawal occurs. This type of dependence is seen more in alcohol and drugs, and also sometimes in sexual and pornographic addictions. Not all drugs cause physical dependence, however (ex. Cocaine).   
 Many factors affect why people become addicted: 1) genetic factors 2) How drugs interact with brain (amount of dopamine release) 3) environment (ex. Vietnam vets, those who have been sexually abused, etc.) 4) mental health (more than half of addicts have also had mental problems) 5) coping with feelings 6) religious reasons (more like spiritual emptiness).

**Summary of biblical principles of the topic:**  
 The Bible talks about being slaves not to sin but to righteousness (Rom 6:15,16,18,20). This means that we must be living our lives in thankfulness to God. As such, allowing our bodies to become addicted to an earthly substance or lifestyle is very wrong, and damages our relationship with each other and with God. 2 Peter 2:19 says “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.”   
 It is important to note that those troubled individuals who are addicted are not dead in sin or condemned to hell. God holds the power to purify and make whole again. 1 John 1:9 says “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”  
 All of creation owes its existence to God, and as such, all creation praises God. Humans have a unique position in this creation, however, because we were designed by God in His image, for fellowship with Him and with other people (Gen 1:26). Thus, we are called to live our lives according to how God has willed us to live, outlined in the Bible, in thankfulness to Him.   
 In addition to his, we are called by God to “love our neighbour as ourselves, for this is the greatest and second command” (Matthew 22). Thus, it is our duty as Christians to help our neighbours—especially our troubled and addicted ones—to the best of our ability. This includes gaining knowledge about addiction in order to attempt to help these troubled individuals to the best of our ability, and be Gods tool to further His kingdom.

**Process used to integrate the Christian faith with the scientific topic:**  
 Christian medical doctors need to see the tremendous danger of viewing addictions as simply a condition or disease (like, a disease like Chlamydia or the flu, or a condition like FAS or ADD). Viewing addiction in this way results in us treating those affected like medical patients, as if some drug, medication, or surgery could alleviate the problem. This takes the onus of change off the addict and on to the treatment, which is a destructive and ineffective way to help the addict overcome his or her addiction. In addition, viewing addiction as a disease would remove the properly placed sympathy and compassion that we should be showering on those people suffering with addictions. Thus, rather than viewing addictions as diseases, Christians need to see past the immediate problems of the addiction itself, and concentrate more on the deeper and often spiritual problems that existed in the first place to give birth to the person attempting to find answers in addicting substances or lifestyles. As Christians, we know that the true reason for us living on this earth is to commit our lives to Christ, repent from our sins, accept His promises, and work out our salvation every day again by serving God with our lives to the best of our ability. True happiness in this world can truly only come by observing Gods commands. Thus, going through the difficult process of detoxification, or abstaining from an addicting lifestyle in order to once again live as productive and normally functioning members of our society is merely half the battle. We need to look deeper to the more serious problems – the problems inside. As Christians, we as medical doctors, professional councillors, therapists, or friends, can help those suffering with an addiction by empowering them to not only believe in themselves, but believe in something more. That is, to see that living life through God is the only way we can be truly happy in this life because then and only then will we understand our life’s calling, and our purpose here on this earth.

**Main arguments used to persuade the reader of the thesis statement:**  
 1) Therapies that solely rely on medical intervention show a very low “cure” rate, whereas self-help groups (Alcoholics Anonymous, for example), show a much higher rate of cure.   
 2) Whereas disease and/or social victimization models of addiction do not include an aspect of personal choice, people suffering with addictions can only overcome their dependency if they personally choose and want to do so. Thus, just as personal choice and decision making are present during the development of an addiction, personal choice and decision making must be the first step on the road to recovery.   
 3) Although there are many different paths taken to developing an addiction, the dark and deepening spiral after addiction is eerily similar in all stories. This suggests that, although the difficult life situation that arise in an individuals’ life that eventually lead that person to chose to engage in dangerous or addicting substances or lifestyles, the final result of addiction is common across all the examples.   
 3) Some may argue that those who grew up in abusive homes are much more likely to develop sexual addictions when older, because of the abuse that happened as a child. Certainly this correlation is accurate, but it would be unfair to remove the responsibility of the consequences of one’s own actions. Yes, it seems that those who are abused are more prone to become sexual addicts, but that is because they are using sexual encounters to fill the void left by the abuse. Just as they are more inclined to have sexual encounters, I may be more inclined to have fits of rage. However, I must be responsible for my own actions even if I become angry. I have to learn to control myself and not allow myself to lash out by punching objects or people, swearing, or storming off. It’s simply how we are as a result of sin. We all have our weaknesses, but we all must be held accountable for our actions.

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