

# When You Love an Addict

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Wisdom and Direction



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Loving an addict is like watching a slow-motion car wreck, over and over again. Each time you hope it will turn out differently. Sometimes you see the crash coming; other times you don't.

Every time it breaks your heart.

Loving an addict is painful. You worry about their future. You worry about your own. Trusting the addict is next to impossible after all the lies, half-truths, and promises to stop. You hate what they do. And maybe, sometimes, you even find yourself hating them. In moments of fantasy, you imagine how life was the day before you learned just how deep this addiction descends. Sometimes you wish you still lived in denial. But now you know how deep the issues are and you wonder if your loved one will ever hit bottom—or even if there is a bottom to hit.

Despite all the heartache you love this addict. If not, you would have long since thrown in the towel. The trouble is that you do not know how best to love them. You have tried encouragement; you have tried threats; you have tried using natural consequences; you have tried counseling; you have prayed to God for a miracle.

### You Are Not Alone

When you love an addict, you may feel alone but you are not alone. The National Institute of Drug Abuse reports that substance abuse costs Americans about 600 billion dollars each year in healthcare costs, crime, and lost wages.<sup>1</sup> And these statistics ignore the untold costs of sex, Internet gambling, and other non-drug

addictions. That means there are a lot of other people out there who understand intimately the kinds of things you're struggling through.

Even more importantly, you have a God who has entered fully into your reality—including your suffering—and who is committed to being with you through this difficult journey. It is good to know that your God is present in your suffering (Hebrews 13:5). And it is good to know that one day this suffering will pass (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

Yet you long for even more. You want to know *how* to help lead this person you love back to spiritual and physical health. You long to know what you can do to support the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of your loved one. You want *something* to do that will bring about positive change. You've gotten advice, maybe more than you want. Some of it probably conflicts with the advice others have given you. So if you are like the many others who love an addict, you are likely feeling angry, but also confused, hurt, and desperate.

Surviving and thriving when a loved one struggles with chronic addiction requires hanging on to some simple truths while working toward a few clear and attainable goals. First, we need to **face facts**, to face truth in the midst of deception—the very heart of all addiction. Second, these truths must always redirect us to **face Christ**. Finally, seeing Christ in the midst of the reality of our loved one's struggles and our own need, we can then **face forward** to pursue the clear goal of faith working itself out in love in the hard

decisions families and friends must make. Each section in this minibook contains key truths and applications. I encourage you to read through the sections and stop at each application to pray and ask God to help you know how to respond.

### Facing Facts

Life with an addict can be incredibly difficult for many reasons. One huge issue is the cloud of chaos and confusion that seems to hover around addicts. It's difficult to know what exactly is going on with them, why they do what they do, and how they could ever break free. They hide behind so many lies that it feels impossible to get to the truth. While every situation has its own unique set of complicating factors, there are some truths that apply across the board.

#### **Truth 1: Your loved one has a biological, motivational, and spiritual problem – a dis-ease.**

Addictions always have multipronged beginnings, usually revealing biological, motivational, and faith weaknesses. Thus, any help offered to an addict must address each of these overlapping areas of life. Those who struggle to say no to tempting desires suffer like the rest of us—we want things that are out of our reach. We crave peace, stillness, freedom from pain, excitement, prestige, or pleasure. Longings unfulfilled hurt—sometimes a little, sometimes a whole lot (Proverbs 13:12). Longings partially fulfilled only lead to more desire. While you might think these longings are the result of the Fall, it appears that Adam and

Eve experienced some perceived “need” in order to be taken in by the serpent’s deception.

To be human is to long for things we do not have. These longings are ultimately meant to draw us to God, who will “supply all your needs” (Philippians 4:19 NASB) and “satisfies your desires with good things” (Psalm 103:5). Since the Fall we have tried to find other ways to fill our desires and keep ourselves from feeling that unsatisfied longing. Most addictions start with an impulsive attempt to get the thing that seems just out of reach. By definition, impulsivity does not consider the long-term consequence. Inevitably, however, impulses turn into habits, habits turn into demands, and demands turn into slave-drivers. Thus, our loved one may no longer be able to “just say no” to the addictive behavior. Just as poor diet may lead to heart disease, impulsivity may lead to body/soul/mind dis-ease—where God-given power to *say* “No” doesn’t work as God designed.

Except in rare cases, your loved one knows their dis-ease is real. When they are able to be honest, they will report that the addictive behavior no longer serves its original purpose. No longer do they get great pleasure from the addiction. Too often, they act out only to numb the pain of shame and self-loathing.

Probably one of the biggest questions crowding your mind when it comes to your loved one is *why*. While we have pointed to body, will, and spirit problems as the cause of addiction, be wary of the search to answer this question. Rarely does it provide much relief

or even give direction for how to intervene. It is easy to think that if you could just figure out the specific problem or root out the lie your loved one believes, you could find a way to fix what is broken in them. But you must remember that sin and the brokenness it produces are not easily overcome. It took the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ to conquer sin, and this is what your loved one ultimately needs. But there are some practical questions you can ask yourself that can help you understand the struggles an addict faces.

*Applications:*

1. Addictions are body, will, and spirit problems. How might this truth help you gain empathy for your loved one's struggles?
2. Understand how your own sin patterns, even when less controlling and destructive, reveal how you are more like your addicted loved one than different (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9–11). Realizing the ways you are similar to the person struggling with an addiction can increase your empathy and protect you from the natural frustration that arises when you are in a relationship with someone who is acting destructively.

**Truth 2: Addictive behavior often follows a common predictable cycle.<sup>2</sup>**

One reason living with and loving an addict is like watching a repeating car crash is that it seems the addict