

# *The* Good News

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



## Breaking Free From **Addictions** Article Reprint

An Addict's Story: What's at the Root of Addictions? • The Greatest Addiction

# Breaking Free From Addictions

*The curse of addictions takes an enormous toll on people and society as a whole. Addictions take many forms and often are very destructive. How can a person break free?*

by John Cafourek



“Hello, Joe?” It was Wednesday morning, and I was on the phone checking in with a client. “This is Joe,” a voice replied.

“Hi, Joe. How are you today? How’s your battle with drugs been going?”

“I guess I’m doing okay. I got a job since the last time we talked! I’m making about \$10 an hour. That’s not bad—considering my lack of education.”

“Last time we talked you said you had been completely off drugs for a few days. Have you been able to stay off all of them?”

“Well, I am mellowing out with a beer right now.” (It was just after 9 a.m. at the time!) “It helps me unwind and relax. But I’m really not drinking much. I still take a few hits [of marijuana] to get through each day, but nothing real serious.”

Joe is certainly no stranger to addiction. Now in his mid-50s, Joe’s problem with addictions began during his late teen years. His first two addictions were very common ones, tobacco (nicotine) and alcohol. It wasn’t long, however, before marijuana joined the list.

A few years later “crack” (cocaine) and “crank” or “speed” (methamphetamine) were added. Joe says he’s tried a bunch of other drugs as well, but he claims he isn’t really addicted to them.

## The problem of denial

Addiction is a serious and growing epidemic. It’s no respecter of age, gender, ethnicity, economic level or anything else. The statistics are shocking. And amazingly, many who are addicted don’t seem to be aware of it.

Denial is a common defense mechanism. Dr. Patrick Carnes describes an all-too-common reaction:

“When Dan’s therapist told him that he was sexually addicted, he was outraged! He thought his therapist was exaggerating. Dan was certain his real problem was depression. He was simply down all the time, and he wanted to be happier. True, his life had left a trail of broken relationships and he had some sexual problems, but that was because he was so down all the time” (*Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, 2001, pp. 177-178).

While there are many different addictions, the underlying thought process reflects a striking commonality between most all of them.

The addictive agent may be sex, alcohol, tobacco, methamphetamine



virtually all addictions:

- Behavior motivated by emotions, ranging from craving to compulsion.
- Continuance of participation in the behavior regardless of adverse consequences.
- Loss of control over the behavior.

Addictions are often classified into two broad categories: substance abuse and behavioral “compulsions.” Obviously, not every person who has some difficulty or problem controlling either his or her use of a particular substance or behavior is presently addicted. However, since many addictions are progressive, what may be

**Addiction is a cruel taskmaster. Feelings of shame, humiliation and personal failure can be overwhelming. It may seem totally hopeless, but it’s never too late to reach out for help.**

(“meth”), cocaine, heroin, marijuana, sedatives, tranquilizers or hallucinogens such as LSD, PCP or ecstasy, or yet some other substance or behavior. Regardless of the specific agent, an addicted person often becomes very adept at denial. “Oh, I’m not addicted! I’m just going through a difficult time right now and need a bit of a boost. I can handle it.”

Regardless of our specific personal struggle, refusing to admit we need help is often clearly recognized by other people as denial.

### What is addiction?

Definitions of addiction vary within medicine and psychology. Although there is no general agreement on an exact definition, Dr. Howard Shaffer, associate professor at Harvard Medical School and editor of the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, identifies three distinctive behaviors that appear to be present with

just a problem at first can become exacerbated and ultimately develop into an addiction.

### Smoking facts

One of the most prevalent addictions is to nicotine. Smoking is a major killer. Each year tobacco kills four times as many people as all other drugs, suicides, murders, accidents and AIDS put together.

Every six seconds a person dies from some kind of tobacco-related illness. Worldwide, 5 million people die prematurely every year as a result of smoking. In the United States alone, more than 400,000 people die from smoking each year while, in contrast, only 1,000 die from cocaine use.

Smoking can even be a gateway addiction. Smokers are about 14 times more likely to abuse alcohol, about 100 times more likely to use marijuana and about 32 times more likely to use cocaine.

### The astronomical cost of alcohol abuse and addiction

Alcohol alone contributes to about 1.8 million deaths worldwide each year, with 100,000 of those in the United States. It is the third most common cause of death in developed countries, and the leading cause of disease and illness in some countries. About a third of alcohol-related deaths result from unintentional injuries.

Half of all U.S. traffic fatalities are related to the abuse of alcohol. The National Academy of Science estimates that alcoholism and alcohol abuse in the United States cost society \$40 to \$60 billion annually.

Currently, nearly 14 million Americans—1 in every 13 adults—abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. About 43 percent of U.S. adults—76 million people—have been exposed to alcoholism in the family.

It’s estimated that more than 3 million American teens between the ages of 14 and 17 today are problem drinkers. More than 60 percent of high school seniors report having been drunk. And 31 percent say they had had five or more drinks in a row during the last two weeks.

### Understanding other addictions

In his book *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, Dr. Patrick Carnes provides some important insight into identifying some of the common symptoms indicative of sexual addiction by comparing them with characteristics of other addictions.

“A way to understand sexual addicts . . . is to compare them with other types of addicts. A common definition of alcoholism or drug dependency is that a person has a pathological relationship with a mood-altering chemical.

“The alcoholic’s relationship with

## Drug Abuse: A Major Health Problem

The 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, under the auspices of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, tracks drug use among those 12 years and older. It revealed:

- An estimated 20.4 million Americans ages 12 or older were current users of an illicit drug in 2006. This estimate represents 8.3 percent of the population.
- Among American teenagers, 42 percent have tried marijuana, 47 percent have tried cigarettes and 73 percent have tried alcohol by the time they finish high school.
- An estimated 73 million Americans—30 percent of the population 12 years and older—reported being current users of a tobacco product in 2006.

- Marijuana is the most widely used illicit substance in the United States. In 2006, 15 million people were current users of marijuana.
- Inhalant use is heavy among eighth graders, with 16 percent reporting use at least once in their lifetime. These drugs are particularly dangerous because they can damage the nervous system even after a single use, and they can be fatal.
- Almost one in four Americans (23 percent, or 57 million) had participated in binge drinking (having five or more drinks on the same occasion) within the previous 30 days in 2006. Among young adults ages 18 to 25, the rate was 42 percent.
- In 2006, an estimated 30 million Americans drove under the influence of alcohol and 10 million drove under the influence of illicit drugs.

alcohol becomes more important than family, friends, and work. The relationship progresses to the point where alcohol is necessary to feel normal. To feel 'normal' for the alcoholic is also to feel isolated and lonely, since the primary relationship he depends upon to feel adequate is with a chemical, not other people.

"Sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict's relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his life . . .

"Addicts progressively go through stages in which they retreat further from the reality of friends, family, and work. Their secret lives become more real than their public lives. What other people know is a false identity. Only the individual addict knows the shame of living a double life—the real world and the addict's world" (pp. 14-15).

**The anatomy of addiction**

How does addiction actually begin? Perhaps not surprisingly, it starts with the acceptance of delusional thought processes about oneself, allowing these to become rooted in one's personal belief system. As a consequence, addiction stems from faulty core beliefs



would not value them as a person if everything about them was known, including their addiction.

They also believe that their choice, their agent of addiction, is their most important need. Obtaining this pleasure, or perhaps relief or distraction from pain, becomes life's greatest obsession. The addictive agent or behavior begins to be viewed as the only thing that makes their isolation bearable. Consequently, faulty personal core beliefs become the anchor points for intensifying degrees of addiction.

**Impaired thinking**

Interacting faulty beliefs produce distorted views of reality. *Denial* leads the list. Ignoring the problem, blaming others and minimizing the behaviors become part of the addict's defensive repertoire.

Arguments, excuses, justifications and circular reasoning abound in these

it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (James 1:14-16).

**Help is available**

Addiction is a cruel taskmaster. Feelings of shame, humiliation and personal failure can be overwhelming.

If we attempt to fight our battles all on our own, we are likely to make the struggle even more difficult. Family and friends can often provide support and honest feedback, both of which are very helpful. "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Seeking help from others is probably

**Student Reports of Availability of Drugs**

Percentage of high school seniors reporting they could obtain drugs easily in 2006:

Marijuana.....	84.9%
Amphetamines.....	52.9%
Cocaine.....	46.5%
Barbiturates.....	43.8%
Crack.....	38.8%
LSD.....	29.0%
Heroin.....	27.4%
Methamphetamine.....	26.7%
Tranquilizers.....	24.4%
PCP.....	23.1%
Amyl/butyl nitrites.....	18.4%

Source: Press release, "Teen drug use continues down in 2006, particularly among older teens; but use of prescription-type drugs remains high," University of Michigan News and Information Services, Dec. 21, 2006.

**Drug use in the general population**

According to data from the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health:

- 112 million Americans age 12 or older (45 percent of the population) reported illicit drug use at least once in their lifetime.
- 14 percent reported use of an illicit drug within the past year.
- 8 percent reported use of an illicit drug within the past month.
- Data from the 2006 survey showed that marijuana and cocaine use is most prevalent among persons 18 to 25.

**Slicing through the mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and to breaking free from the powerful grip of addiction.**

about oneself that affect how reality is perceived.

Each person develops a belief system that is the sum of the assumptions, judgments and ideas that he or she holds to be true. This belief system contains potent family messages about such matters as one's value or worth, relationships, needs and sexuality. When these core beliefs become inaccurate or faulty, they have the potential to provide fundamental momentum necessary for the development of an addiction.

What are some of these irrational beliefs? Perhaps the most common is the perception of not being a worthwhile person. Addicts believe that other people

impaired thinking patterns. Amazingly, even consequences such as lost jobs, arrests and broken relationships are either overlooked or attributed to factors other than the addiction.

Slicing through this mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and breaking free from the powerful grip of addiction.

Biblical insight illustrates how understanding the progressive mental process can help one recognize and reject impaired thinking. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived,

not easy for most of us. Swallowing our personal pride and being willing to seek out and accept help from others can be especially difficult.

As a counselor attempting to help others,

I've often witnessed addiction's cycle of progressive devastation and destruction in a person's life. One man briefly described his gut-wrenching struggle with alcohol in a few heartfelt words: "Once I started drinking, I just couldn't seem to stop. It's been something like 20 years now. My wife divorced me, and then I lost my family too. After ignoring repeated warnings, I finally lost my job. I've really hit bottom. I guess I have nothing left to lose!"

It may seem totally hopeless, but it's never too late to reach out for help.

### Battling pornography addiction

Sex sells! Pornography, one of the greatest sexual scourges afflicting human society today, is a \$57 billion industry. Porn revenue is larger than the combined

revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises! It also exceeds the combined revenues of the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks.

Overcoming an addiction to Internet pornography may require the use of special computer safeguards. For example, various software programs filter Internet content but still allow normal Web surfing. They can be used to block out offensive Web sites.

The person experiencing the problem should not be the one who installs this type of program, or he or she will easily know how to get around it. It is much better to have your spouse or some other trustworthy adult set up the software on your computer.

Three good ones are CyberPatrol ([www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com)), CyberSitter ([www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com)) and NetNanny ([www.netnanny.com](http://www.netnanny.com)). They cost less than \$40.

## The 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

**Step 1:** We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

**Step 2:** We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

**Step 3:** We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

**Step 4:** We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Step 5:** We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

**Step 6:** We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

**Step 7:** We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

**Step 8:** We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

**Step 9:** We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**Step 10:** We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

**Step 11:** We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

**Step 12:** Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

by the client to find a compatible match in values, approach and methodology.

One of the best-proven paths to recovery for a number of different addictions is the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), but adapted to some other particular addiction.

The 12-step program helps members restore their network of human relationships, especially in their family. Members are taught how to live the program, leaving behind their double life and its delusion and pain. Spouses and families are also given understanding and support through group meetings, such as those provided by Al-Anon.

National telephone hotlines are available to give help and advice for many of the myriad addictions that plague our societies today. Treatment programs, recovery programs and support groups can all be accessed to help break the vicious hold of

addictions. Help is available, and there really is hope for recovery for those who will reach out and seek it.

### Spiritual help

As a counselor, I have become acutely aware of an additional source of help available to those who believe in a Higher Power. Battling a powerful addiction can make



## Battling a powerful addiction can make us feel alone, vulnerable, weak and very weary. Those who seek Jesus Christ's help can tap into a spiritual source of strength and help.

All have free trials, so you can take each for a test-drive before you buy.

### Breaking free

Breaking the hold of any addiction is very difficult. All forms of addiction are vicious because they further the inability to trust others. However, without help from others, the addict often fails to regain control because the addiction is self-perpetuating—it feeds on itself.

Also, many addictions are supercharged with social judgment, ridicule or fear. This makes seeking help especially difficult. Seeking professional help is often a wise decision, but special care should be taken

us feel alone, vulnerable, weak and very weary. Those who seek Jesus Christ's help in breaking free from an addiction can tap into a spiritual source of strength and help.

Jesus said simply, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Paul expressed the huge difference spiritual help had made in his life in his exultant words, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Don't allow addictions to wreak havoc and destruction in your life. Decide now that you will seek out the help you need. You *can* break free from addiction! **GN**

# An Addict's Story: What's at the Root of Addictions?

*What are the factors that can lead a person into addiction? Understanding those factors and how they reinforce each other is a first step to breaking free of many addictions.*

I became an addict when I was 17 years old, although the pattern for addiction was set up in me long before then. At the time of writing this article, I have been free from my addiction for two years and I have every intention of remaining so.

For the purposes of this article, the exact nature of my addiction isn't important. What I want to address are four fundamental beliefs that, as identified by Dr. Patrick Carnes in his book *Out of the Shadows* (2001), underlie many addictions. These are:

- I am, at the core, a bad, unworthy person.
- Nobody could ever love me if they truly knew who I am.
- No one will ever be able to meet my needs; therefore, I must meet my own needs.
- The addictive agent is my greatest need.

## Feelings of unworthiness rooted in childhood

These four beliefs are often at the center of the vortex that is an addict's life. It's important to know these beliefs are present to be able to help the addict to recover.

The first belief—I am, at the core, a bad, unworthy person—is often caused by childhood trauma in a dysfunctional family.

Dysfunctional behavior within a family includes emotional or physical abuse, such as making unfounded accusations, hurling insults, yelling or screaming, berating others, doling out arbitrary and inappropriate punishments, withholding affection, touching in a sexually inappropriate manner and assaulting others (physically or sexually).

These are common examples of abusive behavior that serve to establish the first belief. Even the less catastrophic of these, when directed at or witnessed by children over a protracted period of time, can have devastating effects on the beliefs children develop about themselves. The more catastrophic ones can have the same

The reliance on the addictive agent causes greater shame and self-hatred, which causes a deeper belief that no one could love the addict, which further entrenches the addict's conviction that he has to manage his own needs because nobody else can, which inevitably leads back to the addictive agent as the only thing the addict knows that can quell his emotional pain.

impact after a single instance.

Often these abusive behaviors occur when a parent is an addict or otherwise mentally unstable. The fallout of the parent's behavior can then spill over into the life of his or her child.

When this happens, the child takes on an identity of shame and unworthiness. These concepts are externally imposed and, for the immature mind of a child, the response over an extended period of time is to believe the negative feedback repeatedly heard and experienced. Eventually, a void develops in the heart and mind that begs to be filled.

## Catastrophic feelings of rejection

The second core belief—nobody could love me if they truly knew who I am—has two sides.

First, this belief is the natural fallout of the first belief. When a child takes on an identity of shame and unworthiness, he comes to doubt that anyone could love

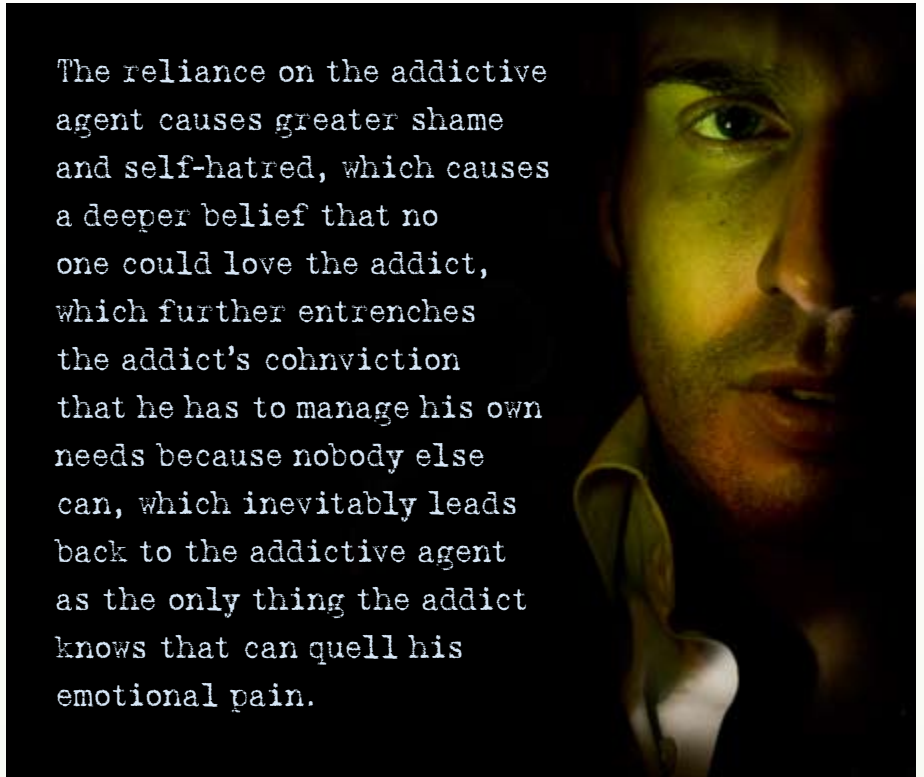
him. If his own parents don't appear to love him, he wonders who else would?

The child anticipates rejection. This belief then begins to color the child's interactions with others. There is the underlying feeling that "nobody would ever love me if they really knew me."

Second, once an addictive behavior takes hold, this belief is fed by that behavior. Addicts are convinced that if anyone really knew the nature of their addiction, there is no chance another person could truly love them.

This belief sets up a self-perpetuating cycle of addictive behavior that reinforces the belief. The cycle goes like this: Nobody could ever love me if they truly knew me; therefore, I need the addictive agent to deal with the pain of that reality, which reinforces the belief that nobody could love me (after all, who would love somebody who does what I do?).

Addicts don't think this way consciously, but this pattern repeats itself in an



unconscious way. It's a vicious cycle that is extraordinarily difficult to break.

### Relying on self prevents seeking help

The third belief—no one will ever be able to meet my needs—follows naturally from the first two beliefs. Once one takes on an identity of shame and is convinced he is unworthy of love, it is a small step to project those beliefs onto everyone he encounters.

These beliefs lead to the person thinking, "No one outside of me is capable of meeting my needs; therefore, I have to rely on myself to do it."

Inside most addicts is an enormous preoccupation with self. It becomes a form of idolatry because the belief that "no one can truly meet my needs" inevitably influences the addict's perception of God.

The self-reliance and preoccupation feed the cycle of addiction to the point that, even in the face of adverse consequences, the addict will not stop his behavior. The belief that help is not found outside himself is strong. It prevents him from seeking the help he truly needs, so he remains trapped by his beliefs.

### A dangerous void waiting to be filled

The fourth belief—the addictive agent is my greatest need—forms once the addict has found the agent that gives him or her the greatest moment of pleasure (relief and/or distraction from pain).

When a young person has the core beliefs I have described, he is a walking void needing to be filled. It is a physical law that nature abhors a vacuum. This is equally true in matters of the heart. The void will be filled by *something*, even if it is harmful.

Eventually, every person who becomes an addict stumbles upon his addictive agent of choice. That agent, once found, appears to salve the pain the addict feels inside. The addictive agent becomes an emotional and physical drug that the addict comes to crave.

The pleasure is short-lived and ultimately not fulfilling but the addict comes to believe that things will never be better than when he indulges in that addictive agent. It becomes his greatest need.

### Addiction: a cruel trap

Once these four beliefs are in place, they are extremely difficult to dislodge because they feed on each other. Each interaction with the addictive agent (which most addicts know is wrong and are ashamed of)

fuels the four fundamental beliefs.

Reliance on the addictive agent causes greater shame and self-hatred, which causes a deeper belief that no one could love the addict, which further entrenches the addict's conviction that he has to manage his own needs because nobody else can, which inevitably leads back to the addictive agent as the only thing the addict knows will quell his emotional pain.

It is a cruel trap and one that Satan uses to great effect. He has perfected it for centuries. I can attest from personal experience that these things ensnare people, for I have been caught in the trap. Addicted people need healing and freedom.

What brings freedom from this dilemma? Because addiction is, in large part, a spiritual problem, the solution must be a spiritual one. It isn't a solution that occurs quickly or easily, however. I don't know of a single addict who has been instantly healed by divine fiat, so I don't think it's wise to expect that. For every addict that I've come to know, the path to freedom leads straight *through* the problem, not around it.

From my own experience, the first step to recovery is found in James 5:16: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

In many cases an addict may have to do one of the hardest things he can imagine (because he is certain that it will lead to the rejection he expects) and that is to confess to trustworthy people everything he has done in his addiction—*everything*—then the healing can begin.

Through the prayers and support of loving people, the addict can begin to challenge the core beliefs about himself. By making himself accountable to people who care, he can replace his wrong thoughts and actions with right ones.

Ultimately he can get to the point where he trusts in the love of others and he can then believe in the love God has expressed for all of us. At that point, the addict is in a position to break the grip the addictive agent has had on his life.

The road I have just described is a long one but, for the addict, there are no shortcuts. The purpose of this article is not to provide a comprehensive solution plan for addicts. Rather, it's to help addicts, or people who care about them, to understand the beliefs underlying most addictions—beliefs that must be rooted out for recovery to take place. **GN**

## Who's Behind The Good News?



**W**ho's behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our radio and TV programs, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God's purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of services in your area, contact us at the appropriate address at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)/contact. Visitors are always welcome.



For additional information, visit our Web site:

[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)

# The Greatest Addiction of All

*Most people know about common addictions to drugs and alcohol. These are difficult enough to face and manage. But the one addiction that is greater than all others is unrecognized by most people. Thankfully, it can be overcome.*

by Jerold Aust

“I can’t get in trouble. I’m a celebrity,” boasted Lindsay Lohan on the night she was arrested for driving under the influence with a suspended license and carrying cocaine (*Los Angeles Daily News*, Aug. 5, 2007, p. 1).

The newspaper article cited here is a sad commentary on the imperious actions of some famous personalities who sometimes do what they want simply because they *can*.

Interestingly, the article’s headline asks, “*Have We Lost Our Way?*” It assumes that we once knew the right way to live and have merely strayed from it. But it assumes wrong. Drugs and alcohol impair good judgment. Yet a greater addiction, more widespread than any other, distorts true values—and most don’t realize that they have it.

## Research into addiction

In the introduction to their book *Addiction* (2007), John Hoffman and Susan Froemke write of their first encounter with various addictions and attitudes toward them. As laypersons, they were researching and preparing to produce a series on addictions for a major cable TV channel. “Neither of us had an in-depth knowledge of the subject,” they say (p. 14).

“Addiction, as it turns out, is a problem that is messy—riddled with misconceptions, profoundly lacking in nationally recognized treatment standards, and highly stigmatized. Conversely, we also came to realize that although the science of addiction is relatively new, tremendous shifts in attitudes are occurring,” they write.

The authors note that addiction is a chronic (ongoing) brain disease. “A vivid contributor to this change in attitude is the fact that science now gives us the ability to see inside the brains of addicted people. We can see that the addicted brain is different; that it is altered. With brain research has come great advances in the medical treatment of addiction and the promise of even more effective treatments on the horizon.”

Hoffman and Froemke attended the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in New York City in 2004, which included a comprehensive seminar on addiction. They learned how medications can help control the cravings of alcoholic addiction.

“But the turning point in our education occurred at the standing-room-only lecture of Nora Volkow, MD, on ‘The Addicted

amine pleasure pathway, the *go* system, and the prefrontal cortex, the *stop* system, respectively.

Under the subheading, “‘Go!’: The Dopamine Pleasure Pathway,” they write: “Research has shown that all drugs of abuse directly or indirectly activate the brain’s pleasure pathway, the intricate network that controls and regulates our ability to feel pleasure.

“When we experience something good—lovemaking, a good meal, a beautiful sunset—our brain experiences a surge in the level of the neurotransmitter dopamine. We feel warm, calm, and happy. After awhile, dopamine returns to a baseline level, and we go about our lives, looking forward to the next pleasurable experience.

“We look forward to the next time because the experience is logged into the brain’s limbic system, which, in addition



**Like other common addictions, human nature—the selfish way of human beings—is highly and dangerously addictive.**

Brain.’ We learned how drugs erode the voluntary acts of an individual. Volkow’s vivid explanation of how the brain’s ancient reward pathways are hijacked due to the spikes of the brain chemical dopamine through repeated drug use was eye-opening” (p. 15).

## The “Go!” system

In chapter 2 of Hoffman and Froemke’s book they address how addiction is a brain disease. One fact is clear: “Drugs and alcohol change the brain—they change its structure and how it works” (p. 55).

The authors show how the brain works emotionally and logically through the dop-

to being the center for pleasure and emotion, houses key memory and motivation circuits. This is what the brain’s dopamine pathway does; it records both the actual experience of pleasure and ensures that the behaviors that led to it are remembered and repeated. In between pleasurable events, there is a quiet period when the neurotransmitters return to their baseline levels” (pp. 58-59).

## The “Stop!” system

Hoffman and Froemke then address the “Stop!” system. Under the subheading “‘Stop!’: The Brain’s Brakes,” they write: “In addition to the ‘Go!’ system, the brain

also has a built-in ‘Stop!’ system: the prefrontal cortex sometimes referred to as the seat of sober second thought.

“With this system, we pull all the information together, weigh it, examine the risks and consequences, and strategize the next move. Is this a good idea? Is this illegal or immoral, or will it make me sick? Will I be able to drive safely, will I be too hung over to get to my job in the morning?”

“When things are working right, the ‘Go!’ circuitry and the ‘Stop!’ circuitry really are interconnected and are talking to each other to help you weigh the consequences of a decision and decide when to go or not to go,” says Childress [Anna Rose Childress, a research associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine]. ‘It’s not that they’re separable. They’re interactive. They’re interlinked at all times.’

“With addicts, however, ‘it is as though [the systems] have become functionally disconnected. It is as though the ‘Go!’ system is sort of running off on its own, is a rogue system now and is not interacting in a regular, seamless, integrated way with the ‘Stop!’ system,’ Childress says.

“Drugs of abuse directly activate the pleasure pathway, but recent research shows that addiction also involves the same pathways that manage memory and learning; that is, the addictive process moves in, undoes or weakens what the brain knew before, and then teaches it something else entirely” (pp. 60-62).

It certainly appears that there’s more to common addictions than we once assumed and that the discoveries of how thinking pathways can be altered might also correlate with the greatest addiction of all.

### The Bible on the greatest addiction

Human willpower is weak of itself, but it’s made much weaker because of human nature. God says that even at our best we human beings are “altogether vanity”—empty (without fulfillment) or transitory (Psalm 39:5, King James Version).

Human nature is simply our tendency to do what comes naturally, what *we* think is best. In practice this usually means “looking out for number one,” following the path of least resistance and doing whatever feels good.

What most people don’t know is that this can be the greatest addiction of all, as well as the most dangerous. It is most dangerous because at the end of human life, with an unchanged, unrepentant attitude toward

human nature, there is nothing left but death (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 6:4-8).

Human nature is at the root of humanity’s problems—from jealousy, to lying, to deception, to hatred, to violence, to seeking power over others and to war, just to name a few of our ignoble traits. Human nature, being selfish and self-serving, often blindly repeats itself in evil acts that are harmful to self and others.

Notice how your Bible describes human nature: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, New International Version). God uses the term *heart* for the motivation, attitude, logic and emotion of the human mind. And as He says here, the heart is incurable of itself; it cannot be cured or set right of itself.

God knew the limitations of human beings. He lamented in Deuteronomy 5:29,



### Notice how your Bible describes human nature: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” They didn’t have the right heart, and neither do we without His help.

The apostle James, half-brother of Jesus Christ, elaborated on the motivations of the human heart and the results: “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you

ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:1-5).

War comes from human nature, not God’s nature. The Bible tells us that Cain was the first human murderer; he killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Since then, human beings have been killing one another by the thousands and millions.

Like other common addictions, the selfish way of human beings that is a part of our nature is highly and dangerously addictive.

### How does human nature work in us?

Human nature, because it is highly motivated to please the self, often leads us to sin. Human nature first surfaced in Adam and Eve, both of whom sinned in the Garden of Eden—Eve through Satan’s deception and Adam without deception (Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14).

Human beings have been sinning ever since. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). The impulses and drives of our human nature are a powerful, underlying and pervasive force. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Sin can become an addictive, destructive force. Paul told Christians of their former way of life: “Because of your human weakness, I am speaking as a man: You once gave the members of your body to be slaves to moral impurity, and to more and more sin . . .” (Romans 6:19; Simple English Translation).

Those who function by way of their

human nature alone cannot understand or obey God. Often deceived by their own nature and by sin, they ignorantly assume there is no other way to act.

As Paul explains: “For those whose lives are according to the flesh [human nature] think about the things of the flesh, but those whose lives are according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God’s law, for it is unable to do so” (Romans 8:5-7, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

## Influences on human nature

The biggest influence on human nature comes from Satan, the great enemy of God and all of humanity. He is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:2, NIV), the one who presents himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) while in reality he is the source of spiritual darkness and blindness.

Another powerful influence on our nature is the world around us. That, too, is largely shaped according to Satan’s influence. He is “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), a powerful being who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

Certainly Jesus knew the root of human nature, saying: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

## God wants us to change

The big question that most people would want answered is, If God knows how bad human nature is, why would He allow us to have it?

As the Creator, God is ultimately responsible for all things, good and bad, though He does no evil and did not create evil. Satan is the instigator of the evil that dominates human nature, not God, and he will ultimately be held accountable for deceiving human beings and holding humanity captive to his corruption and confusion (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:1-3; Isaiah 14:12-15).

As mentioned, human willpower is weak and human nature weakens us even more. Jesus knew this, saying, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

God wants us to overcome our human nature by Christ living in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot reach our ultimate destiny of being part of the family of God without this process.

This process includes believing faith as demonstrated by godly works (James 2:17-26). God gives eternal life to those who are forgiven of sin through Christ and, with His help, overcome their sinful nature (John 3:16-17; Revelation 2:26).

God is transforming imperfect human beings who have human nature into His perfect immortal sons and daughters (1 Corinthians 15:42-53). Human beings

who repent and submit to this change from the addictiveness of their human nature prove to God that they want His way of life forever.

They overcome their selfish nature through the power of God’s Spirit enabling them to live by His Word. Having done this throughout the remainder of their physical lives, these human beings are changed into spirit beings, actual divine children of God (Hebrews 2:10).

God knows that when people come to



## We must always seek help from above. God has provided the necessary help for us to overcome our sins, this world and the devil.

fully understand the wicked depths of their human nature and its terrible effects, they can choose to turn to Him for His help to overcome the unceasing downward pulls of human nature. God is pleased to give to such people His gift of eternal life. For when we honor Him in our weakened human condition, He knows that we will remain faithful later in a divine condition.

## Overcoming with God’s help

The first thing we can do to overcome this greatest addiction of all—being led by our self-centered human nature—is to recognize and admit that we have this nature and that we cannot save ourselves from what it leads to—death (1 John 1:5-10).

However, we cannot fully overcome our human nature until God the Father draws or calls us (John 6:44) and gives us His help. When we respond to the Father’s call, we have an opportunity to repent of our sins, be baptized and receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Beyond this initial change, we must always seek help from above. God has provided the necessary help for us to overcome our sins, this world and Satan the devil. If we remain faithful and endure to the end, we can live in God’s world to come as part of His everlasting Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15).

## We can win against the greatest addiction

Humankind is readily susceptible to all kinds of addictions, such as those to drugs and alcohol, because of the weaknesses of the flesh and rebellious human nature. God gave us freedom of choice (Deuteronomy 30:19). But we must prove to Him that we want *His* way above *our* way so He can give us eternal life, all made possible through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrected life (Romans 5:10).

Reading and studying God’s Word, with His Holy Spirit, helps to wash our minds from wrong and sinful habits (Ephesians 5:26). Additionally, the knowledge and acceptance of Christ’s shed blood covering our sins help cleanse our consciences from past dead works (Hebrews 9:14).

The greatest addiction can indeed be overcome—in fact, it *must* be. The apostle Paul strove to control his entire mind

and body for fear that, after he preached to others, he could lose the battle against his own human nature (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The headline mentioned at the beginning of this article asked, “*Have We Lost Our Way?*” As pointed out, this assumes that we once knew our way, that our way was right and that we have now strayed from it. God would not agree.

The greatest addiction affects all humanity. Sin is the pleasurable root of it (Hebrews 11:25). Human nature can be overcome. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

Take great courage. You *can* overcome the pulls of your human nature, the greatest addiction of all, with the help of Almighty God in Christ (Hebrews 4:15-16; Romans 8:28, 31, 37-39). **GN**