

Addiction: Illness? Choice? Disease? Sin?

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[0 : 00] Yeah, okay. Good. We are going to turn to our Bibles now and we're going to be reading in three different places this evening. And there's one little verse at the end there for you to look up, perhaps during the offering.

But if you can find Exodus 20, Psalm 115 and 1 Corinthians 6. Just a few verses from each of these places. And you will see, I think, when Terry comes to speak to us, how they all begin to fit together. Exodus chapter 20, of course, is way back at Sinai when God is speaking to his people Israel, having called them out of bondage, out of slavery in Egypt and set them free as the people under his lordship.

And Exodus chapter 20, verse 1, tells us that God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourselves a carved image or any likeness of anything that's in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

[1 : 19] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

And if you turn over to Psalm 115, from which we read at the beginning of the service, where the psalmist is saying that it's to God's name and God's name alone that glory is to be given. He is in the heavens. He is the sovereign Lord. At verse 4, then, he contrasts any other notions of God.

Speaking of the nations, he says their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak.

Eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear. Noses, but they do not smell. They have hands, but they do not feel. They have feet, but they do not walk.

[2 : 30] And they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them, what a devastating word this is, those who make them become like them.

And so do all who trust in them. And I turn over to the New Testament and to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 9.

And he's speaking here of the same idolatry. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers.

None of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

[3 : 49] And you can look up the very last verse of John's first letter later, which sums up really the whole message of his letter. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Amen. May God bless us his word. Let us pray together. Father, what we know not, we pray that you would teach us.

What we have not, we pray that you would give us. And what we are not, we pray that you would make us. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, our normal practice here at the Tron is to take a passage or a chapter of Scripture and unpack and apply that particular portion of Scripture.

Well, this evening we're going to do things a little differently. This evening there will be no exposition of the Scriptures by Terry McCurchin. You may be sitting thinking to yourself, well, that's just the

same as any other time you're in the pulpit, Terry.

So we're going to do things a wee bit differently. And I'm very grateful to Willie for giving me the privilege to address you this evening. And in this address this evening, I want to begin to equip you with a biblical understanding of addiction.

[5 : 11] I want to challenge maybe the preconceived ideas that some of you may have about what is going on in someone's life when they are trapped in an addiction.

And having challenged those ideas about what is going on, I want you to be leaving here and absolutely no doubt that above all else, that above all the types of organizations and all the different types of workers that someone trapped in an addiction may need, that above all of that, someone trapped in an addiction needs an organization and people to come alongside them and to minister God's Word to them.

And so I also want to challenge your thinking around what constitutes Word Ministry. That Word Ministry isn't confined to being a lecturer at Cornhill, working for a church, or working for UCCF, or among students.

My title this evening is Addiction. Is it an illness, a choice, disease, or is it sin? Understanding addiction biblically and how that understanding shapes and forms and governs our evangelism and care of folks.

So we want to have a biblical answer, a biblical understanding of and to that question. What is at the root of these things? For when we have the biblical understanding, which is the only understanding that matters, when we have the biblical understanding of these matters, then how we approach and how we deal with folks who have addiction issues will be shaped and governed biblically.

[6 : 56] And surely as Christians, that is what we should always be aiming for. There are many who believe the Scriptures to be true. But when it comes to addiction, they don't rely on Scripture to shape their view.

It's as if they rip 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17 right out of their Bibles. All Scripture is breathed out by God. But it is not useful for teaching or reproof for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

They would say that they believe the Scripture to be true. But when it comes to addiction, they don't rely on Scripture to shape their view. They would do well to come along next Sunday morning and listen to the new series on why we believe the Bible.

Well, most of what I'm going to say this evening has been taken from August 2016's edition of Table Talk from Ligonier Ministries, which I'm sure all of you, some of you, if not all of you, are familiar with.

And this book here, produced by CCEF, is called Addiction, Banquet in the Grave, written by a guy called Ed Welsh. I think this is the best thing out there on a biblical understanding of addiction.

[8 : 18] It's fantastic about getting right to people's hearts. Probably one of the most staggering social phenomenon that we witness in our Western world is the sheer number of addiction recovery groups.

The world, it seems, is off its head with addictions. That is, if the amount of self-help, 12-step fellowship and support groups are anything to go by. I actually had a list of 12-step fellowships and support groups, but it read a wee bit like a telephone directory, so I don't have time to read it out to you.

But here are just a couple, some that you may be familiar with and some maybe not. Alcoholics Anonymous. Cocaine Anonymous. Clutterers Anonymous, I suppose for hoarders maybe. Families Anonymous, for relatives and friends of addicts. Food Addicts and Recovery Anonymous. Gamblers Anonymous. Narcotics Anonymous. Sexaholics Anonymous.

And these last two here, I think, must be for pastors and those in ministry. Under-earners Anonymous. And Workaholics Anonymous. So it seems that the world has a terrible problem with addiction.

[9 : 31] It's absolutely rife in the world. But here is a question. Do you have a good grasp on the wealth of biblical material that speaks precisely to the modern problem of addictions?

Can you go through any book in scripture, even if it doesn't mention alcohol, food or sex, and see how it speaks to addictions?

Think about it. If addictions are really as prevalent as they seem, then we would expect that scripture would be full of this. That scripture would be preoccupied with this struggle.

And friends, it is. My good friend Robert, who was one of the first guys on our Hope for Glasgow Day program, he's now graduated to glory.

Robert was in McDonald's with a recovering drug addict friend of his. And as they left, they bumped into this woman who was also a recovering drug addict. She says, oh, you've just been for something to eat.

[10:29] Where are you going now? And the boy that was with Robert said, we're going to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. And the girl said to Robert, are you going to the Narcotics Anonymous meeting as well?

And Robert replied, no, I'm going to a Bible study. She replied in a horrified voice with a horrified face. A Bible study? A Bible study?

What's the Bible got today with addiction? And Robert replied in a way that only Robert could reply.

What's the Bible go today with addiction? Well, apart from every page, nothing.

If addictions are really as prevalent as they seem, then we would expect scripture to be full of this. Scripture to be preoccupied with this struggle. And it is.

So, so far, so good. But here is the problem. What all the 12-step fellowships teach, well, the ones that I'm aware of anyway, what these fellowships say is that the root of addiction is totally at odds with the biblical understanding.

[11:37] 12-step fellowships say that at the root of addiction is a disease or an illness. Addiction as disease model. And perhaps this is simply part of a broader trend in society at large, where the notion of sin is gradually being erased from our national life.

This model has been endorsed by some areas of the medical profession. And so now even some churches and church leaders take this as gospel fact. And they have church support groups and programs.

And that's what they teach. You have a disease. Well, what the disease model teaches is that addicts cannot help themselves. Now, that's obvious if you're in full-blown addiction.

You can't stop. You can't help yourself. And we would know that personally. And we would know it from the experience of the apostle in Romans chapter 7. But the disease model teaches that at the root of the problem, remember the root of the problem, we know about the fruit.

They can't stop. They can't help themselves. But at the root of the problem is you have an illness.

You have a disease. Let me quote just a little from the Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guide.

[12:51] If you go along to Alcoholics Anonymous or some other 12-step fellowship, you can just attend the meetings and you can get sober. But they have the 12 steps, which is a sort of a discipleship program.

And you would go through the 12-step program with a sponsor or a recovery partner. Someone who is a lot longer in recovery than you and who has actually went through this program.

So it's their discipleship program. So I'm quoting directly from this. Let me quote just a little from the Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guide, page 1 and step 1. Some of us find a measure of comfort in realizing that a disease, not a moral failing, has caused us to reach this bottom.

You see, I'm not bad. I'm just sick. I'm unwell. There is nothing morally wrong with me. But this disease is not just confined to the area of drug use.

Again, Step Working Guide and page 1. It may be that we have been around the meetings and the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous for a while, and we are abstinent from drugs.

[13:56] But we have discovered that our disease has become active in some other area of our lives, forcing us to face the powerlessness and the unmanageability of our lives once more.

Now, it doesn't mention what these areas of our lives might be, but use your imagination. Fill in the blanks. But whatever these areas are, it's the disease that is the cause of the unmanageability.

And I've heard people in meetings saying things like this. I'm really struggling with the disease today. The illness is all over me today. My disease is out to get me today.

It's not me. It's the illness. It's my disease. Again, Step 1, page 1. What makes us addicts is the disease of addiction.

It's not the drugs, not our behavior, but our disease. There is something within us that makes us unable to control our use of drugs. This same something also makes us prone to obsession and compulsion in other areas of our lives.

[15 : 03] How can we tell when our disease is active? When we become trapped in obsessive, compulsive, self-centered routines, endless loops that lead nowhere but to physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional decay.

It's almost really good, isn't it? We could almost just slip the word sin in there for the word disease and almost make it Christian. So these guys haven't got it right and neither should we expect them to see things clearly and neither should we expect them to get it right for they have not been awakened by the Spirit of God and therefore they do not have the clarity and the conviction of sin that the Spirit of God brings.

But by God's common grace, they do see that there is something wrong. They don't see it correctly. They don't see it fully. But they see that there is something wrong.

So we shouldn't be looking to lambast these folks. We should be looking of ways to draw alongside them and help them in their understanding. I still actually attend Narcotics Anonymous just every now and then, maybe a couple of times a year, maybe when one of my friends is celebrating a recovery milestone like 19 years or 20 years.

I've got great friends there who attend regularly, guys who are not believers, but guys that I love dearly. And I love that through God's common grace, many people that would have been dead long ago are alive physically and clean from drugs.

[16 : 38] I love that. But I'm also deeply aware that they are not clean and they are not alive spiritually. And that saddens me greatly. They are saved from temporal evil, but they are not saved from eternal evil.

Our good friend Alistair Begg writes the foreword to our former minister, Sinclair Ferguson's book, *In Christ Alone*. And in the foreword, Begg quotes George Smeaton. And here is what Smeaton says.

To convert one sinner from his way is an event of greater importance than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from temporal evil. There is no denying in the 12-step fellowships, many are delivered from temporal evil, but they are not converted.

They are not saved. And so I totally understand that some Christians and some pastors wouldn't want to send folks to these places as they are not Christian. There is no mention of the cross, no mention of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they don't deal with addiction at the heart of the matter, which is the human heart.

But God is at work in these fellowships by his common grace, helping people to get clean, helping them to get sober. And I have also found that the solidness of their abstinence approach is much sounder than some Christian leaders that I know who work in this arena.

[18 : 03] I've known Christian leaders with past addiction issues who would say that it's okay to drink alcohol. If you've only ever struggled with illegal drugs, then it's okay to drink alcohol.

Now, I'm not a temperance guy. No, I would never want to take things further than the Bible takes them. But alcohol is a drug. And I know that the Scriptures do not say do not drink alcohol, but the Scriptures clearly show us that there are ways to drink alcohol that are not sinful, and there are certainly ways to drink alcohol that are sinful.

And if you've had an addiction to substances before your conversion, then it's just a wisdom issue. It's common sense that you would put safeguards in place in this area and not put God to the test. I remember a wise old man in Alcoholics Anonymous, he was trying to give me some advice to help me guard against the thought of me ever socially drinking again, of me ever becoming a social drinker.

But I would say that I was always a social drinker. The Social Security gave me the money, and I drank it. But anyway, what this wise old man said to me was, he knew I was a Christian, and what he said to me was this, he said, Son, see when Daniel got out of the lion's den, he did not go back for his bunnet.

[19 : 25] Now what he said obviously wasn't from the Bible. It's not there in the text of Daniel chapter 6, I've checked. What he said wasn't in the Bible, but what he said was deeply biblical, and was full of great theology.

And what in essence he was saying to me was this, do not put the Lord your God to the test. Now maybe these Christian leaders that I know of with past addiction issues, with drugs, maybe they can get away with drinking alcohol, maybe they can get away with that.

I know that the grace of God can change and work in folks differently, but because God's grace has changed you in a certain way, I don't think this gives you a license for you to promote this as your message to all of those that you work with who are trying to put a life of addiction behind them. All of those starting the Cornhole training course tomorrow. It won't be soon before you are taught something about narrative. And what you will be taught about narrative is, narrative is not normative.

So because you read it there in the scriptures, does not mean you should expect it just exactly in the same way to work out in your life. So biblical narrative is not normative.

[20 : 39] So if biblical narrative is not normative, then the personal narrative of how God has worked with you in your life is also not normative. Because God's grace has changed you in a certain way, it doesn't give you a license for you to promote this as your message to all those that you work with who are trying to put a life of addiction behind them.

It's dangerous. You're playing Russian roulette with people's lives. And you would need to firstly be absolutely sure, firstly, that the grace of God has actually touched someone's life.

And secondly, that God's grace had touched their lives in exactly the same way as you. There is a residential rehab here in Glasgow called Phoenix House.

It used to be in the Springburn area in Kippacull Road, but a couple of years ago it moved to Annie's Land Cross. And it's a secular rehab for both men and women. And they used to view alcohol and drugs separately.

It was a year-long program. And for the first six months, everyone had to be totally abstinent. But then after six months, they said they were going to teach those with addictions to illegal drugs, things like heroin and cocaine, things like that.

[21 : 50] They were going to teach them to drink alcohol safely and sensibly. Well, that approach led to many drug-related deaths. And it eventually led to them changing their approach to a total abstinence approach.

But anyhow, to get back in step, the 12-step fellowships do teach that at the root of addiction is a disease. Though through the 12-step process, they do take responsibility for the things that they have done.

They take responsibility and they are encouraged to make amends, to make restitution to those that they have harmed. Responsibility for the things that they have done, but not responsibility for the disease itself.

Let me quote again from the Step Working Guide. And this time from Step 8 and page 72. This step deals with making amends, making restitution.

Some of us hesitate in making amends because we really don't want to make them. Some of us go to the other extreme. We can't wait to get out there and make everything okay.

[22 : 56] Unaware that we may cause more harm, we blunder forward, confessing infidelities to our spouses and our friends. We sit our families down and make them listen to every detail of our addiction, confirming some of their worst fears about what we were doing out there.

And filling in some blanks until then had been left mercifully empty. In a state of excitement, we give our children a speech about how we have a disease for which we are not responsible.

How we love our recovery and how wonderful life is going to be from then on in. We stroll into our employer's office one day and announce that we are addicts. We have embezzled a great deal of money through ingenious means, but that we are very sorry and we won't do it ever, ever again.

In its context, the Step Working Guide is not advocating making amends like this, but at the center of this paragraph, there's a wee line, I think, that gives rise to this sort of a thing. We give our children a speech about how we have a disease for which we are not responsible.

It's not my fault. It's the disease. It's no immoral failing. There's nothing morally wrong with me. It's purely a health problem. I have a disease.

[24 : 14] In this example, disease is being used to relieve folks from their personal responsibility for sin. Something that society at large is also determined to do, blaming other factors.

It's no your fault. It's your environment. It's no your fault. It was your upbringing. It's no your fault. It's the adverse childhood experiences that have traumatized you as a child.

Now, friends, these factors can and do play a significant role. We would never ever want to play down any trauma that folks have experienced, but neither would we ever want to relieve them from personal responsibility.

Personal responsibility must never be removed. It's no matterful. I have a disease. Now, the Bible does use the language of disease and illness when describing the spiritual condition of the human race.

From Isaiah chapter 1, Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. [25 : 20] There is no soundness, only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with olive oil. This is talking about the spiritual condition of the people of Israel and the idolatry of the people of Israel.

It's like a sickness. It's like a disease. So the Bible does say that sin has many things in common with disease. Like sin, disease can affect every part of us.

Like sin, disease can be painful. And like sin, disease can lead to death. But we can't take one description of sin and build our whole theology and understanding of addiction from that.

The Bible uses lots of other language to describe addiction. And so therefore, we have to take all of the Bible's teaching before we can begin to build our theology and build our biblical understanding. Well, why is this such an important issue? Well, because I fear that the more Christians accept an understanding of addiction in all its forms, the more that Christians accept an understanding of addiction as a disease, we will lose an understanding of sin.

[26 : 36] I think I've shown clearly what the 12-step fellowships mean and teach by the disease of addiction and why we can't accept that biblically as Christians. So what is going on then?

Well, there are many biblical categories that can help us understand what is going on in someone's life when they are trapped in the grip of an addiction. But before we look at a couple of these categories, let me first establish the biblical view of drunkenness, which I suppose is the prototype of all addictions.

The history of drunkenness extends back to the beginning of recorded history. There is a wealth of material in the scriptures that speak about drunkenness. And the biblical view of drunkenness is that it is always called sin.

It's never referred to as a sickness. Always sin and never sickness. Why? Well, because drunkenness is against God and His law. Scripture is unwavering in this teaching and relentless in its illustrations.

Noah from Genesis 9, Lot from Genesis 19, Elah from 1 Kings 16, Nabal 1 Samuel 25. They all portray the moral foolishness of being mastered by alcohol.

[27 : 49] And we also have those famous verses from Proverbs 23, which offer a timeless description of the drunkard. Who has woe?

Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine. Those who go to try mixed wine.

Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end, it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. You will see strange things and your heart utter perverse things.

You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies in the top of a mast. They struck me, you will say, but I was not hurt. They beat me, but I did not feel it.

When shall I awake? For I must have another drink. It's all there in those verses. The seductive, hypnotic appeal. The insanity of it all.

[28 : 49] The cravings that seem irresistible. And also the fact that consequences, no matter how bad or how damaging the consequences might be, they do not put the drinker off.

And the New Testament, well, the New Testament continues in the same vein as the old. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or of greed or is an idolater, a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler.

Do not even eat with such a one. So there in that list the Apostle Paul gives us, drunkenness is no different from sexual immorality, greed, and swindling. But the Apostle takes it further in the next chapter in the verses that were read to us earlier in the service.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived.

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God. And again in Galatians 5, the Apostle records this as works of the flesh.

[30 : 11] Now the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Friends, if drunkenness was an illness, a sickness, or a disease, then what the Apostle Paul, in fact, what the Bible is saying, is you will not inherit the kingdom of God if you have this illness, this sickness, or this disease.

Can you imagine the list in 1 Corinthians 6 or Galatians 5 saying that if you have cancer, then you will not inherit the kingdom of God? Cancer is a disease.

It is a sickness in most cases for which folks are not responsible. But drunkenness is a sin for which we are responsible.

So at the root of drunkenness and addiction is sin. A sin that is no worse than the other sins in the list, but a sin nonetheless. Not illness, not sickness, not disease, but sin.

[31 : 26] There are many biblical categories that can help us understand what is then going on in someone's life when they are in the grip of an addiction. But in the time we have left remaining, I would like to focus on two.

Firstly, addicts are idolaters. Addicts are idolaters. Addiction is fundamentally about worship, false worship.

Drunkenness and addiction violates the command of God. You shall have no other gods before me. It was Martin Luther who said, whatever your heart clings to and confines in or relies upon, that is your God.

So whatever people flee to, whatever they flee to for solace, comfort, help, support, that thing is functionally playing the role of God in their lives.

You see, friends, on one level, the addiction works. It does something for the addict. It helps them to forget. Helps them to deal with emptiness, to manage emotions, to escape, to avoid pain, to give confidence, to fit in with others, to give courage in place of timidity and a whole host of other reasons.

[32 : 42] So when needing help, the addict looks to their addiction. Psalm 121, I lift my eyes to the hills now. The hills just represent the battles the challenges and the hardships of life that we all have to face.

I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come from? Well, for the addict, the answer is not my help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

No, the addict's answer to that question is when faced with the hills in my life, my help comes from my addiction. It comes from a bag of smack, a crack pipe, a bottle of whiskey, or a bottle of vodka. Not looking to the one true God, but looking to something destructive to deal with the hills of life. Wherever your heart clings to and confines in or relies upon, that is your God.

Friends, idols don't improve us. They reduce us. They hollow us out. They leave us less than we were before. They leave us less human, less satisfied, less of what we could and should be.

[33 : 54] Addiction is idolatry, false worship. But secondly, addicts are slaves. Addicts are slaves. False gods cannot satisfy.

They cannot liberate. They can only enslave. That is the only power that they have, the power to enslave. And I suppose enslavement is the picture that probably comes to all of our minds when we think of those who are addicted.

Their whole life and thinking is centered on their addiction. Addicts are slaves. But it is a slavery that begins voluntarily. Some addictions begin very simply.

You tried something, you liked it, but it is more likely that what you first said was, I don't like the way I feel. In response to the misery, you said, I want to manage my world my way.

Instead of running towards God, the addict runs towards the future addiction saying, I like this. This is what I have been looking for all of my life. And because they like it, they say, I want to keep doing this.

[35 : 03] Over time, the addiction begins to serve more and more purposes. In the addict's life, they then say, this means so much to me. I love it. Anything that becomes the center of your world

other than God is ultimately going to leave you feeling empty.

Addictions are no different. The addict says, I want more. I need more. All the while, it becomes less satisfying. Like the rolling stones, I can't get no satisfaction.

But I try and I try and I try. But I can't get no satisfaction. It's absolute insanity. The addict believed the addiction, the idol, would cure the emptiness.

But now the idol becomes part of the cause of the emptiness. The addict has now mastered saying to their addiction, you are my God. Once mastered, the addict experiences bitter tragedy.

This hurts. I've been betrayed. I want it. But I don't want it. You could sum up addiction in this way. Addiction is slavery. But it's voluntary slavery.

[36 : 10] As the Apostle James puts it in his letter. Our lust leads to sin, to sin. And sin leads to death. Lust, sin, death.

Friends, that's Satan's LSD. First sin fascinates, then it assassinates. First it thrills, and then it kills. But it is a death that began voluntarily.

Addictions don't just happen. They creep up in you with small steps. Steps that you allow or even initiate. I would sum up my own addiction to drugs like this.

It began with a choice. A choice that became a dominant choice, which then led to me being enslaved and having no choice. Choice. Dominant choice.

No choice. I was mastered. Sin was crouching at the door. And its desire was to master, to rule over me. I was mastered.

[37 : 10] But my slavery began voluntarily. I wonder if any of you are familiar with John Bunyan's poem, A Caution to Stir Up, to Watch Against Sin.

Verse 2 of that poem goes like this. Sin rather than its will, out of action be, will pray to stay, though but a while with thee.

One night, one hour, one moment will it cry. Embrace me in thy bosom lest I die. Time to repent, it says. I will allow. And help, if to repent, thou knowest not how.

But if you give it entrance at the door, it will come in and will go out no more. Sin is crouching at the door and its desire is to master over you.

We may feel that we have nothing remotely in common with those trapped in addictions. But seeing addiction in the biblical categories of idolatry and slavery help us to see that we are not as far removed from those with addictions as we may at first thought.

[38 : 18] We may feel there is a huge gap between ourselves and maybe everybody else in the Tron congregation and those who are addicted to substances. But having a biblical understanding of addiction helps us to see that the things that the Bible teaches that are true for addicts are also true for all sinners.

By nature and without Christ, every man, woman and child is guilty of false worship. Romans chapter 1 verses 21 to 23. We all exalt ourselves and look to the creation rather than the creator for meaning and for help.

We are all idolaters. in addition, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, we are all slaves to sin. Anyone who makes a practice of sin becomes a slave to sin.

John chapter 8. We cannot help but sin. We are dead in sin and we can do nothing about our sin. And in actual fact, we are doomed by our sin.

Ephesians 2, 1 to 3. So none of us is as far removed from the addict as we might at first think. In fact, fundamentally, we are all the same.

[39 : 36] It may not be gambling, alcohol, drugs, food or sex for us, but again, to quote Sinclair Ferguson, all addictions are but a manifestation of a deeper addiction, which is life lived independently of God.

Our lives may not be as messy and chaotic as those trapped in addictions, but in reality, we have the most important things in common.

In Adam, we are all idol-worshiping slaves to sin. In fact, you could say we are all addicted to sin. And I'm sure if we're all honest friends, then all of us know what it is like to be addicted to patterns of sin in our own lives.

Outside of Christ, we are all slaves to sin and idolatry. Well, once we see that the problem of addiction is really the same problem of sin, then we can see that the solution to addiction is the same as the solution to sin, which is the transforming gospel message.

And this then helps us to see that as churches, we need to offer nothing more to the addict than we do to any other sinner in our congregation. both need the life-giving, transforming power of the gospel.

[40 : 57] Tim Keller was asked, how would you change someone's life and behavior? And Keller replied, you have to change what they worship. You have to change what they worship.

The addict needs what Thomas Chalmers called the expulsive power of a new affection. Well, with all of that said, however, we must acknowledge that, yes, there is lots of commonality, but there are also differences.

And reaching out to those with addictions will pose us with peculiar challenges. to that end, here are some practical things to help keep in mind as we try to help folks in these circumstances.

Firstly, don't give false promises. Don't give false promises. Never tell folks, come to Jesus and you will be cured.

Have you been cured of all of your sin? Never make false promises like that. You know, quite a few of the guys that I work with actually became addicted to substances after they became Christians.

[42 : 05] I know plenty of people in churches who are real bona fide Christians and they're struggling with addictions. Don't offer Jesus as some miracle cure when there's no ongoing fighting and battle required.

I remember this quote from one of the first series he ever did from Galatians. It was so good I remembered it. We are saved as Christians not from the fight but for the fight.

We are not saved from the fight but for the fight. So we need to prepare for war and we need them to prepare for war. Relapses will happen but we have to help folks to respond well when things go wrong as they inevitably will.

We deal with people in our churches every week for whom this is true and it can be true for us too. So don't make false promises. Secondly, don't be naive.

Don't be naive. You're dealing with folks who are compulsive liars. Lying is part of the addict's life. So you will need discernment.

[43 : 14] And here is a helpful tip. How can you tell that a drug addict or an alcoholic is lying? Well, their lips are generally moving. They are manipulative and convincing with their stories.

So ensure you put measures in place to safeguard those in your congregation from being fleeced by them and also to ensure that you protect and you care for the addict properly.

Addicts would steal from their children and their grannies. So they wouldn't bat an eye at conning a wet-behind-the-ear Christian like you. So don't be naive. Thirdly, help those who want help, not those who need help.

Help those who want help, not those who need help. Jesus asks a question in John chapter 5. Do you want to be well? It seems such a strange question.

Surely everyone would answer yes to that question. But when the addicts that I have worked with understand what Jesus means by being well, you can't see them for dust. So working with addicts will be costly in terms of time, energy, and resources.

[44 : 24] So help those who want help. Don't waste your resources on someone who isn't interested. As Hugh McKenna used to always say, don't try and scratch somebody when they're no itchy.

So help those who want help, not those who need help. Fourthly, being part of the local church is absolutely vital. Being part of the local church is absolutely vital.

Never be content to only have a support program for addicts, even if it is firmly rooted in the word of God. Folks need to be rooted in the local church.

We at Hope for Glasgow believe that the local church is central to addressing the addiction issues in our city, not Hope for Glasgow. We believe it's the local church. For in the local church week by week, you will be taught and be fed from the staple diet of God's word, which will help you to understand your battles and arm you to fight against all the idolatries of your heart.

Being part of the local church is where you worship God, and you will learn to worship him in everyday life. and true worship is the best weapon against all addictions and against all sin.

[45 : 42] The local church is where you will find family. Family who are also fellow idolaters, who are also in the process of learning to flee and hate their own idolatries.

And this is where you will also be reminded of the Christ who was crucified for them, who has won the battle for them. being part of the local church is vital.

That's why we at Hope for Glasgow will only open our evening support groups in partnership with churches who are committed to teaching the scriptures. And also what we are trying to do is to create pathways into good teaching churches.

This church, in my opinion, has the strongest teaching pulpit in Scotland. And so it's vital that a church with this sort of a reputation has services like Tronite 2.

A service like Tronite 2 is absolutely vital. And it's absolutely vital that the scriptures are taught at Tronite 2. Tronite 2 is not a soup kitchen, and it never has been.

[46 : 52] It's vital that the scriptures are taught at Tronite 2. Do those who attend Tronite 2 deserve less or need something different from every other ministry in the church? church. Being part of the local church is vital.

And lastly, do not feel inadequate. You are equipped for the task. Do not feel inadequate. You are equipped for the task. Anyone here ever feel inadequate when speaking to or ministering to those with addictions?

Because you don't have a background of addiction yourself? that's the addict's war cry. You can't help me if you're not an addict. You can't help me if you've not been there.

What do you know? You're only a textbook junkie. What do you know? You can't help me. Can you imagine asking a doctor who was about to perform life-saving heart surgery on you if he'd ever had a heart attack?

And when you find out that he hasn't, you say, oh, well, you're not operating on me. I mean, you better go and find me a surgeon that's had a heart attack. You wouldn't do that, would you? It's absolutely ludicrous.

[48 : 01] But it's a commonly held view amongst addicts and those within the 12-step fellowships that you can only help me if you have been there. Friends, you must never hold or share this view.

Sure, for most of us, we cannot identify with some of the chaotic and horrible consequences that usually accompany the life, the behavior and the culture in the world of a drug addict.

But remember, at the heart of this issue is an issue of the heart. And with the scriptures, you are equipped for the task.

Do not feel inadequate. You are equipped for the task. Well, I think we've only begun to scratch the surface. But this is how we should understand addictions biblically.

And this is how that understanding shapes our gospel care and evangelism of those with addictions. Let us pray together. Father, we indeed give you great thanks for your word that corrects and informs our understanding.

[49 : 14] Thank you that in your word we have everything we need to minister to every type of broken sinner and to offer them the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray that you would raise up men and women competent in handling the scriptures and with a heart and a compassion to minister to those broken with addictions in all its forms so that your church may indeed fulfill its calling to go into all the world with the Lord Jesus.

So that those who, the dearest idol that they have known, however much adored, they would tear it from your throne and worship you as Lord.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.