

ADDICTION

Alcoholism and drug dependency, whether marijuana, crack cocaine, methamphetamines, heroin, ecstasy, or powerful prescription painkillers, are problems of crisis proportion in virtually every community in the world.

Vast amounts of money are being spent waging a futile battle against drugs; it is a war we are losing and cannot win because it is a key prophetic sign of the End Time, pointing to the soon Second Coming of Yashua. Almost weekly the various media sources try to personalize this pervasive plague, showing various individuals (often young people) who have surrendered their minds and given their bodies over to horrendous, destructive addictions.

Do you know an addict? It is highly likely this person has wasted all his / her resources on drugs, even stole from family and friends, or got involved in crime or prostitution to feed his / her enslaving habit. It's heartbreaking to see bright, decent people sink so low that they literally can't help themselves. I've known drug-enslaved youngsters who went into rehabilitation programmes and seemed to be all right for a while. But too often they ended up right back on drugs, more hopeless than before.

Other addictions

Besides alcohol and drugs, millions of people are obsessed by gambling, uncontrolled spending, pornography, illicit sex, and other vicious vices. Millions more spend hour after hour surfing the Internet, playing PC / video games, or sitting like zombies in front of their TV sets watching inane and immoral programmes. In those cases where individuals embrace abundance and excess, these people are obese, literally eating themselves to death, fatally addicted to food.

When the above-mentioned activities habitually and obsessively control people's behaviour, causing them to develop a compulsive need for whatever controls them, they are addicts. These kinds of addictions are powerful, and potentially deadly.

Rather be 'addicted' to good

According to the dictionary, one of the definitions for *addiction* has a positive connotation: "a compelling motivation." I believe this is what the Apostle Paul was exhibiting when he declared in 1 Corinthians 9:16, *Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*

He was saying, "I am compelled to share the gospel. There is something about my calling that is so powerful that it is like an addiction. There is nothing else I can do but preach; I can't help it, I must do this." No wonder he wrote in Romans 1:15, *I am ready to preach the gospel...*

Paul's calling must have been a "compelling motivation," because he travelled all over the known world of his day preaching the gospel, making converts, and planting churches. In some areas he was accepted, honoured, and lauded, but in many other places he was met with opposition and persecution. No doubt there were plenty of times when he might have turned back had it not been for his 'addiction' to the gospel and carrying out the Great Commission.

Acts 14 relates how unbelievers sought to stone Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, but they escaped and went to preach at Lystra. There his persecutors did stone Paul, and left him for dead. But he managed to get up and go to Derbe, another city in the area, to preach. After teaching many people there, Paul headed right back to Lystra and Iconium to minister in the very places where people had tried to kill him.

Later Paul listed some of the persecution and trouble he faced in order to carry out his calling. He spoke of being *in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness* (2 Corinthians 11: 23-27).

Why did Paul take such risks and endure such pain and hardship? Because he was an ‘addict’ to his calling, and had to go, even if it meant facing persecution.

Are you willing to pay the price?

There is a price to be paid for serving God. Those who are not sold out, body, soul and spirit, to their commitment to Yashua and their calling to His commission, may find the Christian lifestyle too arduous and difficult. Some have turned back and said, "This is not for me." But many, many others have given their all to the cause of Yashua. They became ‘addicts’, who gave themselves so completely to the Lord that they could do nothing else.

We have a great host of tremendous examples, all the way back to the first disciples. All of them became martyrs for the Lord; they were all murdered for their faith, every single one. And there are other great Christian champions in almost every era.

Take David Livingstone for example, the renowned missionary to Africa.

Livingstone was born into a poor Scottish family, and began working fourteen-hour days in the cotton mill at age 10. He went to night school for two hours after work each day, and would also prop books on his machine so he could study while working. Later he studied medicine and theology in Glasgow, and soon felt called to go to Africa as a missionary.

Asked why he would leave Britain to go to the "dark continent," where he most likely would give his life and die, Livingstone said simply, "I am compelled by the love of Christ."

For the next thirty years he served God in Africa as a missionary preacher, physician, scientist, anti-slavery activist, and explorer. He trekked over and mapped an amazing one-third of the continent. When Livingstone died on May 1, 1873, kneeling by his cot in prayer, his faithful African friends buried his heart at the foot of a giant tree, mummified his body and carried it almost a thousand miles to the coast. A ship carried his remains to London, where he was buried

in Westminster Abbey on April 18, 1874. That day was an official day of national mourning in England.

Livingstone made a total life sacrifice for God, and the result was many remarkable accomplishments for the Lord. "Compelled by the love of Christ," he helped change the course of history in Africa and strike a powerful blow against slavery world-wide.

Buried next to Livingstone in Westminster Abbey is his brother, John. While David was preparing himself for a lifetime of missionary service, John's ambition was to find a way to earn lots of money. Apparently he was successful and became very wealthy. John also became a famous cricket player, and enjoyed fame and adulation in addition to his affluent lifestyle.

None of these things were worthy of consideration when John's memorial marker was inscribed. There is no mention of his wealth, fame, or position. The marker reads simply: John Livingstone, the brother of David Livingstone."

Isn't that astounding? All of John's riches and privileged lifestyle amounted to nothing in the end. But David Livingstone's 'addiction' to the gospel, being compelled by the love of Christ, will be recognized forever, both here on Earth and in eternity.

Are you an 'addict' for God?

It takes dedication, hard work, and an all-consuming passion for soul-winning and for giving people hope and comfort in a troubled world. Help others open their hearts and lives to our Lord.

Even if you are not called to a pulpit ministry, or to minister on television, or in a church setting, Yahweh has given you a special gift to share with others. There is a way you can serve the Lord; in fact, there are people you can reach with the gospel who might not respond to anyone else in the whole world.

Wherever Yahweh has placed you is your mission field. How can you be a witness to those in your world? Are you taking advantage of your unique opportunities to be used of the Lord?

What if you set a goal to share a testimony, a word of witness, or to stand up for what is right at least once each day? You wouldn't have to be a preacher, or have dozens of Bible verses memorized, or be a trained counsellor. What if you just shared what God has done in your life? If you are willing to do it, someone will listen!

Become an 'addict' for Yahweh, for good, driven by an all-consuming passion to make a difference in the Kingdom.
