

The Nature of Man: Addiction and Recovery

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Stages of Addiction

Why can some people use alcohol for years with no signs of abuse and others show signs immediately? Why do some people in recovery struggle their entire life to remain free of a chemical and others seem to quit with ease? An understanding of addiction and recovery will help answer these and other questions.

Chemical abuse usually begins because of curiosity or peer pressure. Less frequently, chemical abuse begins with medication prescribed by a doctor but later misused. In the early stages of addiction, the user experiences pleasure or relief. Individuals in this stage can usually stop by their own willpower. Many people stop using prescription narcotics and alcohol with no serious difficulty. These people may wonder how others would ever have a problem quitting such substances.

Chemicals abused typically include tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, and misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. Illegal drugs include such chemicals as marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines. Behaviors such as gambling, viewing pornography, and over-spending money are also “addictive”. In many ways these behaviors follow the traditional pattern of addiction. This chapter will focus primarily on chemical addiction.

Some users proceed from the first stage where relief and pleasure are experienced further down the path of addiction. They begin to use more frequently, use in a manner other than directed by a doctor, or use the chemical or substance to cope with some painful aspect of life. Tolerance, the need for more of the substance to have an effect, is most noticeable during this middle stage of addiction. These people can often still successfully quit by initiating self-recovery techniques and willpower. These individuals realize the negative consequences of their use, make a decision to stop, and move on to discover new and better satisfactions. They often stop because of legal problems, family problems, or financial problems. Although these persons may be abusing substances they are free from the serious consequences of the “disease” of addiction. These people feel and do better in their lives when they quit. Their problems,

including the problems they thought they were "medicating" with substances, fade away, and the anguish of substance use disappears.

From those reaching the middle stage of addiction, some proceed more deeply into the full course of addiction or dependence. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), The National Institute of Health (NIH), American Psychiatric Association (APA) and many other organizations refer to this stage of substance dependence or addiction as a “disease.” Most professionals believe this stage of addiction includes four characteristics:

- craving,
- loss of control,
- withdrawal,
- tolerance (an increased need for substance to obtain an earlier high),
- and for LDS professionals, the additional characteristic of decrease in spirituality.

The essential features of substance addiction are a cluster of cognitive (thinking), behavioral, physiological (body functioning), and spiritual symptoms indicating that the individual continues to use the substance despite significant substance-related problems. In many cases using the substance persists despite the user’s desire to quit. LDS Family Services has written a Twelve Step workbook entitled *The LDS Family Services: Addiction Recovery Program-A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*. This manual serves as a core document for Family Services’ related Addiction Recovery Programs held throughout the world. This manual describes the group of users in the last stage:

They have become so dependent on the substance that they no longer see how to abstain from it. They lose perspective and a sense of others priorities in their lives. Nothing matters more than satisfying their desperate need. When they try to abstain, they experience powerful physical, psychological, and emotional cravings. As they habitually make wrong choices they find their ability to choose the right diminished or restricted.

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Elder Boyd K. Packer of the LDS Church taught about the disease stage of addiction by saying: “Addiction has the capacity to disconnect the human will and nullify moral agency. It can rob one of the power to decide”¹ For the users in the “disease” stage of addiction, willpower and self-recovery efforts alone will not suffice.

The Nature of Man

The nature of man includes mind, spirit, and physical body. When a person becomes addicted each of these parts of man is affected. Theodore M. Burton stated, *“I repeat that the use of tobacco, tea, coffee, and alcoholic beverages of any kind is not only displeasing to the Lord, but also destructive of your **body and mind.**”*² On another occasion, Elder Russell M. Nelson informed us that the spirit is also addicted: *“Addiction to any substance enslaves not only the physical body but the **spirit** as well.”*³ During earth life the mind, spirit and physical body are interwoven together, functioning as “one” soul.

The mind, spirit and body each develop unique characteristics supporting the disease of addiction. The spirit seeks for that which is spiritual; the physical body for that which is carnal, sensual and devilish; and the mind journeys into the direction it has been trained. During the first stage of addiction, man has agency to choose which influence to follow. Following the yearning of the spirit leads to a life of inner peace and happiness. To follow the yearnings of the flesh with no discipline or restraint often leads to an addiction. However, once agency has been used to initiate substance use, the user also chooses the consequences. Elder Nelson continues, *“While we are free to choose, once we have made those choices, we are tied to the consequences of those choices. We are free to take drugs or not. But once we choose to use a habit-forming drug, we are bound to the consequences of that choice.”*⁴ Recovery from the disease stage of addiction requires healing in each of these areas.

Earth life is a “school” for the physical body which is the organized house of man’s mind and spirit. In order to accomplish God’s purposes the physical body must be schooled. It must be brought under the refinement of the holy spirit. The mind is a primary tool by which spiritual dominance is obtained. When a person ignores the prompting’s of the Holy Ghost and continues to yield to the yearning, desires and appetites of the physical body both the spirit and mind lose power.

Physical Body

The compulsive use of substances causes physical changes in the body. These physiological responses are hallmarks of addiction: *cravings, tolerance, and withdrawal.*

Craving. A craving is a strong physiological drive to use the substance. An important concept underlying alcohol craving for example is the "kindling" phenomenon. The term refers

to long-term changes that occur in neurons after repeated detoxifications. Recurrent detoxifications are believed to increase alcohol craving. Kindling explains the observation that subsequent episodes of alcohol withdrawal tend to progressively worsen. Physical cravings for the substance occur with the use of other drugs besides alcohol. For those individuals quitting a substance after prolonged and heavy use, physical cravings continue.

Tolerance. Tolerance is the need for greatly increased amounts of the substance to feel intoxicated. It can also mean a strongly reduced effect with continued use of the same amount of the substance. The degree to which tolerance develops varies greatly depending on the substance. For each drug, varied degrees of tolerance may develop because of its different central nervous system effects. For example, opioids, heroin and many pain medications e.g. Loritabs, slow the respiratory system and lose the ability to reduce pain at different rates. Individuals with heavy use of opioids and stimulants can develop substantial levels of tolerance. The same heavy dose may well be lethal to nonusers.

Withdrawal. Withdrawal occurs when blood and tissue concentration of an addictive substance decreases in an addicted individual. Withdrawal affects behavior, thinking and body functioning. Withdrawal symptoms generally vary greatly with the different types of substances. Marked and generally easily measured physical signs of withdrawal are common with alcohol, opioids, and sedatives, hypnotics, and anxiolytics. For example, typical withdrawal symptoms from alcohol may include: insomnia, nausea or vomiting, hallucinations, anxiety, and grand mal seizures. Withdrawal signs and symptoms are often present but may be less obvious with stimulants such as amphetamines and cocaine, as well as with nicotine and marijuana. Their negative effects are slower to show up, but may eventually result in brain damage.

Physical recovery. The physical aspects of addiction have an overpowering influence on the mind and spirit and if left unchecked can lead to and maintain an addiction. Latter-day Saints are expected to govern their bodies with discipline and restraint according to the laws, ordinances, and covenants of the Gospel. However, when a person is addicted to drugs, alcohol, or tobacco the physical body is allowed to have an overpowering influence on the spirit and mind.

Detoxification is a medical treatment often used to assist a person to successfully go through withdrawal. Although withdrawal from some drugs like alcohol can be very serious, with proper detoxification the body can safely go through withdrawal within only a few days.

The body can be detoxified from most aspects of a physical addiction. However, desires, appetites, and cravings, may be more difficult to overcome. A person recovering from addiction, not only has to overcome cravings, tolerance and withdrawal, he/she will also have to change and improve physical habits. Because of the physical aspect of addiction, developing a lifestyle with proper nutrition and exercise as found in the *Word of Wisdom* (Doctrine & Covenants 89), becomes a key element of recovery.

If the individual dependent upon substances continues to use until death, the addicted body goes to the grave and wastes away. The spirit goes to the spirit world carrying with it addictive thoughts, desires and feelings maintaining the addiction beyond the grave. The physical body without the spirit has no life or power. As John and James states: “*The spirit giveth life to the body*” (John 6:36).

Mind

The mind is a marvelous instrument. It is the source of our thoughts. The mind is used to think, judge, form attitudes, and make choices. The final result of one’s mortal probation is influenced by the kind of thoughts he/she has day-to-day. The spiritual and physical aspects of our souls are continually affected by our thoughts. Elder Boyd K. Packer explained the important role of the mind over the body by saying “*Your body is the instrument of the mind.*”⁵ The kind of thoughts an individual allows to linger in the mind, good or bad, has an influence on the spirit, body, and eventually behavior. It could be said, “As the mind goes, so goes the body”. There are certain thoughts and attitudes that can create and maintain addictive behavior. Addiction often starts in the mind typically through the power of choice.

The person who is burdened with an addiction after overcoming the physical aspects must then begin the labor of retraining the mind. The training of the mind consists of controlling the mind to have drug –free thoughts. Training the mind means to develop spirituality and maintain healthy thoughts and attitudes. Eventually self-mastery will return. A person will remain subject to addictive behavior until he changes his pattern of thinking. Brigham Young stated, “*The greatest mastery man ever learned is to know how to control the human mind and bring every faculty and power of the same in subjection to Jesus Christ. This is the greatest mastery we have to learn while in the tabernacles of clay*”⁶ Changing thought patterns from the lies and secrets that support addiction to more positive and healthy patterns is critical to

recovery. Samples of addictive thoughts might be *“I don’t have a problem. I can quit anytime I want.”* Or *“I’m not hurting anyone but myself. It’s my body.”* Samples of healthy, healing thoughts would be, *“I have a very serious drug problem. I need help,”* and *“I’m hurting everyone around me. My body is a temple. I need to change.”*

For an individual who has reached the disease stage of addiction returning to the use of the substance is not unusual. This process is most frequently referred to as relapse. In the LDS Church’s book *Preach My Gospel*, the problem of returning to the use of substances is somewhat expected:

Since it is likely that some may return to an addiction, priesthood leaders and members should not be shocked or discouraged if they learn that an investigator or new member may be struggling with such problems. They should show confidence in the individual and not be judgmental if the person yields to an old craving. They should treat it as a temporary and understandable setback...⁷

Training the mind to eliminate addictive thoughts and attitudes is essential to preventing relapse. Most individuals experience progressive warning signs that reactivate old thoughts and behaviors which make substance use seem like a good idea again. People who are healing from addiction must be taught how to identify and manage relapse warning thoughts and attitudes before they do relapse.

Our mind can be like a puppy on a leash moving here and there into good or bad territory and must be continually pulled back by its owner on the strait path. Our mind must be trained to become a righteous obedient servant. The body will respond positively to healthy drug-free thoughts. Developing the discipline to cast out of the mind addictive-promoting behavior is essential to recovery.

Reading a good book or singing a song and not letting the addictive thought or attitude linger in the mind can help the addicted mind recover. When a person chooses to discipline and train the mind according to gospel standards, they can receive divine inspiration and guidance. An addiction may start and be maintained in the mind by thoughts that support addictive behaviors. Recovery requires the proper use of the mind and mastery of thoughts and attitude. Persons will remain in an addictive pattern until they gain self-mastery of their mind and also regain and maintain their power of right choice.

Spirit

Using illegal substances, intentionally misusing prescriptions or over-the-counter medications always decreases spirituality and the influence of the Holy Ghost. Addiction leads to a neglect of the spiritual side of life such as personal prayer, attending church meetings, partaking of the sacrament, and fulfilling church callings. The user typically stops reading the scriptures and learning about the gospel. As the substance use continues the spirit becomes addicted. Addiction is very much a spiritual disease. As a result, the person with addiction always becomes less spiritual and more secretive and dishonest in conversations and actions.

Recognizing the importance of spiritual growth in addiction recovery, the LDS Family Services addictions workbook summarizes the spiritual nature of recovery by saying:

*By being humble and honest and calling upon God and others for help, you can overcome your addictions through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.... If you suspect you are addicted and if you feel even the smallest desire to break free, we invite you to join us in studying and applying the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ ...*⁸

When a commitment is made and a person lives according to gospel principles, change occurs. The influence of the Holy Ghost strengthens the power to govern the mind and body and avoid addictive behavior. Disciplining the mind, spirit, and body according to the laws of God is essential to healing from an addiction. It is the spirit that gives life to the physical body. A person will remain in an addictive behavior until there is an increase in spirituality. *“Remaining active in the Church and striving to live faithfully are the most important things any individual can do in overcoming addiction problems.”*⁹ There is no doubt that repentance and Christ’s Atonement are essential elements of addiction recovery.

Recovery in this life

The companionship of the Holy Ghost is essential for a complete recovery and healing of addiction, The Holy Ghost can strengthen the mind, the spirit,, and the body. When a person becomes addicted the mind, the spirit, and the body are addicted. We have to achieve healing from the addiction either during earth life or after death in the spirit world.

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your

bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:34, Book of Mormon).

Melvin J. Ballard explains:

*It is my judgment that any man or woman can do more to conform to the laws of God in one year in this life than they could in ten years when they are dead. The spirit only can repent and change, and then the battle has to go forward with the flesh afterwards. It is much easier to overcome and serve the Lord when both flesh and spirit are combined as one.*¹⁰

The mind, body, and spiritual behaviors supportive of addiction must be overcome in a balanced attack of strengthening the mind, spirit and body during this earth life. Otherwise, an individual with an addiction will continue to suffer the slower process of repentance without the body in the spirit world.

Summary

During the disease stage of addiction, all aspects of the individual develop addictive characteristics. Complete recovery involves each aspect of man: the mind, the spirit, and the physical body. Overcoming an addiction is hard work and can be a slow process; therefore, the person with addiction must be patient. Setbacks and relapse are a normal part of recovery. Look at setbacks as part of the learning and the changing process. Recovery from addiction can be complicated for some who may have an underlying mental illness, limited intellectual functioning, or lack of family support. It takes more than just a passion for religion; more than just quitting the use of the substance; and more than just positive thinking for eternal recovery to occur. The mind, spirit and body, each require change. An individual overcomes addiction by living a healthy physical lifestyle, mastering thoughts and attitudes, and increasing spirituality.

¹ Boyd K. Packer, Conference Report, October, 1989, 16 or *Ensign*, November 1989, 14.

² Theodore M. Burton, The Word of Wisdom, *Ensign*, May 1976

³ Russell M. Nelson, Addiction or Freedom, *Ensign*, November 1988

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Boyd K. Packer, *Our Father's Plan*, Deseret Book, 1984, page 24

⁶ Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, 1:46

⁷ *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004, page. 189

⁸ *The LDS Family Services: Addiction Recovery Program-A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*. 2006, Page vi

⁹ *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004 page 190

¹⁰ Bryant s. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949], 241.

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