

Addictions: What Does God Have to Say?

Presented by Cornerstone Church's Pastor of Counseling, Matt Mumma, M.A. Biblical
Counseling, Level 2 ACBC Certified Counselor

I. Why a Study on Addictions?

A) Henry Brown

B) Biblical counseling - Counseling that uses the Scriptures to recognize and deal with sin and suffering with the purpose of turning toward and becoming more like Christ (Colossians 1:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:14). Therefore, the mission of Cornerstone Church Biblical Counseling is to equip you to meet the challenges of life by the transforming power of Jesus Christ for the glory of God.

II. How Pervasive are Addictions in Teton County and in the US?

A) Drugs/Alcohol

1. In 2014, 20.2 million adults in the U.S. had a substance use disorder.¹
2. In a 2014 study, 9% of adults in Teton County admit to a heavy drinking pattern. 33% of 12th graders report binge drinking (highest rate in WY).
3. 88% of all arrests in Teton county are alcohol related.
4. 45% of Domestic Violence arrests in Teton County are alcohol related.
5. In a 2014 study, 55% of 12th graders in Teton County report alcohol use in the past 30 days, 45% of 10th graders report alcohol use in the past 30 days, 29% of 12 graders reported marijuana use in the past 30 days, and 86% of 12th graders and

¹ NIMH Statistics: Major Depression Among Adults, *National Institute of Mental Health*, www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/substance-use-and-mental-health/index.shtml, (4/6/2017).

75% of 10th graders attended a community event during the past 12 months where adults were drunk or intoxicated.

6. According to several Teton County dispatch officers, there is at least one DUI phone call a night.
 7. See appendix #2 for full Teton County drug and alcohol statistics.
- B) Eating Disorders – I include these stats because of the similarities between addictions and eating disorders. In fact, it could be argued that both Bulimia and Anorexia are addictions themselves.
1. Exercise Physiologist Glenn Gaesser stated that, “over 50% of females surveyed between the ages of 18-25 would prefer to be run over by a truck than be fat, and 75% would rather be mean or stupid.”²
 2. 81% of ten year olds are afraid of being fat.³
 3. Research by The Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders proposes: “Eating disorders affect up to 24 million Americans and 70 million individuals worldwide.”⁴

C) Pornography⁵

2 Glenn Gaessner, *Big Fat Lies: The Truth About Your Weight and our Health* (New York:Fawcett Columbine, 1996), 28.

3 L. Mellin, S. McNutt, Y.Hu, G.B Schreiber, P. Crawford, and E. A Obarzanek., “A longitudinal study of the dietary practices of black and white girls 9 and 10 years old at enrollment: The NHLBI growth and health study” in *Journal of Adolescent Health* (1997) 20(1), 27-31.

4 The Renfrew Foundation for Eating Disorders, “*Eating Disorders 101 Guide: A summary of Issues, Statistics, and Resources*” (2006), Web. <<http://www.renfrew.org>>.

5 Tim Challies, 10 Ugly Numbers Describing Pornography in 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-ugly-and-updated-numbers-about-pornography-use>, 5/8/17.

1. In 2016, people watched 4.6 billion hours of pornography *at just one website* (the biggest porn site in the world). That's 524,000 years of porn or, if you will, around 17,000 complete lifetimes. In that same time people watched 92 billion videos (or an average of 12.5 for every person on earth).
2. 11 is around the time when the average child will be exposed to pornography.
3. 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral in their view toward pornography.

III. What is Addiction?

- A) There are many different understandings of what an addiction is and where it comes from.
- B) Some claim that addictions are diseases for which individuals are not responsible. Others claim that it is a moral issue for which the addict is culpable. Still others find variations of the disease and moral theories.
- C) Mark Shaw, founder of The Addiction Connection, says an addiction is the “persistent habitual use of a substance known by the user to be harmful and often, but not always produces a physical dependency.”⁶
- D) Ed Welch, counselor and author of “Addiction: A Banquet at the Grave” defines an addiction as, “bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangements from God.”⁷
- E) American Society of Addiction Medicine states, “Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in

⁶ Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective*, (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, Kindle Edition, Kindle Locations 149-151.

⁷ Edward Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet at the Grave*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2001), 35.

these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.”⁸

- F) It is important to understand what a disease is and whether or not addictions fall into that category. Dr. Charles Hodges says that any disease has “a pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.”⁹
1. While it is clear that many addicts develop physical issues as a result of the addiction, according to Dr. Hodges’ definition, the addiction itself cannot be considered a disease. There can be no pathological tests to show that a certain imbalance in the body that causes one to consume a substance. As we will see later, it is strongly advised that anyone with an alcohol or other substance abuse issue, seek out medical advice in addition to seeking counseling.
 2. Family history can play a larger role in ones addiction more than their physiology.
- G) Therefore, it is more accurate to ground the cause of addiction as spiritually/morally rather than physiologically/anatomically. While it may seem like there is less hope for calling addiction a moral issue, there is a greater degree of light shed on addictions. Dr. Heath Lambert, the executive director of the Association for Certified Biblical Counselors has said, “Christians understand that moral problems are sin, and trace back to the rebellion that exists between God and man, for which we sinners are always held accountable.”¹⁰ Here we see the problem with mankind. But we will soon see the solution for all of the sins of man, including addiction.
1. How do we know that an addiction is sin? A few verses:

⁸ Andy Farmer, *Trapped: Getting Free from People, Patterns and Problems*, Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 124.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *Good Mood, Bad Mood*, (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2012), 36.

¹⁰ Heath Lambert, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/2017/01/addiction-moral-problem-not-disease/>.

- a) Proverbs 20:1
- b) Ephesians 5:18
- c) 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

2. These verses speak to more than just the tasting of a beverage, but rather to the enslavement of it.

H) Mark Shaw also states, “Using the non-biblical terms ‘substance abuser’ and ‘addict’ and ‘alcoholic’ suggests that one is less responsible before God and that is not true. The substance abuser and addict are responsible before God for the thoughts, words, and behaviors that led to becoming physically addicted to alcohol and drugs.”¹¹

NOTE: While we use the term “addict” in our material and counseling, we do so understanding the individuals responsibility and accountability. It is more accurate to speak of addictions as an enslavement.

- I) So, for our time today we can define addiction as “the persistent, habitual desire of a substance, activity, or anything else which they think will give them satisfaction and lasting joy.”
- J) We have to be careful to not label the addict as a special kind of sinner. They are just like the rest of us only they tend to have certain characteristics or distinctives in their struggle that we might not see in others to the same degree.

IV. What can be Addictive?

- A) Pornography
- B) Sex
- C) Alcohol
- D) Legal and illegal drugs

¹¹ Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective* (Kindle Locations 4395-4398). Focus Publishing. Kindle Edition.

- E) Social media
- F) Eating disorders
- G) Tobacco products
- H) Food
- I) Gambling
- J) Much, much more

V. What Does the Bible Have to Say about Addiction?

A) Biblical addictions counseling is based on fundamental beliefs about the Bible:

1. Inspired – 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21
2. Inerrant – Psalms 19:7-14; Matthew 5:17-18; 1 Peter 1:23-25
3. Authoritative – 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 2:15
4. Sufficient – Psalm 19:7-14; 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Philippians 4:4-9
5. Understandable – 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 119:130

B) 6 key truths about the nature of addiction¹²

1. God created man as a creature who is dependent by nature (Matt 6:25-26). We must start with God when speaking about any addiction.
2. Man was also created to be dependent upon God in order to find life and blessing (Gen 2:15-17; Deut 8:3). As with any other sin, those trapped in an addiction have chosen to seek independence from God rather than to be dependant on Him alone for what they were seeking (joy, happiness, satisfaction, love, etc.)

¹² Outline adapted from John and Janie Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women*, (), 107-110.

3. Ever since sin came into the world, mankind has continually strived for autonomy and self-sufficiency (Gen 3:16; Jer 9:23-24; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 1 John 2: 15-17). “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2: 15-17).”
4. In spite of mankind’s feeble efforts at self-autonomy, he remains a dependent creature (Isaiah 31:1-3; Matt 10:28).
5. Instead of turning to God, man turns his heart to idols (Prov 25:28; 1 Cor 10:6-11; 1 Peter 4:1-6; 1 John 5:21). Man was created as a worshiping being. It is not a matter of if someone worships, what what are they worshipping. Let’s prove that everyone is a worshiper.
6. Man is captivated and ensared by the idols he trusts and loves, resulting in a horrible bondage of both body and soul (Prov 5:22, **9:13-18**; Ezekiel 14:1-11; Rom 1:24-25).
 - a) Addictions are a full-bodied worship of an idol of your own choosing that now control you. Since all of mankind has been tainted by sin, we worship things and people other than the creator God. This is often referred to as idolatry.
 - b) Mark Shaw writes: “The word ‘idolatry’ can be applied to any pleasure that becomes so excessively desired that it replaces the desire to worship God. This may include drugs, alcohol, sex, food, gambling, sleep, television, internet, exercise, sports, and video games, just to name a few! Second Timothy 3:4 identifies persons who desire an idolatrous pleasure more than they desire to honor God as ‘lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.’ Loving pleasure may include avoiding pain; the two ideas are different sides

of the same coin. Both the love of pleasure and the avoidance of pain (or escape) fuel any ‘addiction.’”¹³

- c) Any addiction can be identified as the worship or desire of a substance or anything else which they think will give them satisfaction and lasting joy. Tragically, however, rather than finding joy or satisfaction in God, the addict becomes enslaved to their addiction with destruction as the consequence (Galatians 6:8).

- d) Also, since everyone, including the addict, is a worshiping being, they are complex beings. Meaning that often times the individual is not bowing down before the bottle. The alcohol is merely and means to a promise of satisfaction.¹⁴ Someone may choose to turn to alcohol as a means of seeking some perceived good without God. It may be that they are seeking pain relief, or escape from life’s hardship, or a desire to be loved and accepted. Whatever the reason, the heart of every addict is worshiping someone or something other than the true God of the Bible.

C) Appendix #1 - Three Tree Diagram

D) Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35 - Seven Symptoms of Enslavement¹⁵

- 1. Willingness to sacrifice hard work, possessions, and all or most of one’s wealth in order to secure additional dosages of the chemical (Proverbs 23:20-21).

Question to ask someone: “Are you willing to sin against someone to get what you want? Are you willing to sin if you do not get what you want?”

¹³ Ibid, Kindle Locations 286-297.

¹⁴ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience*, Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 66.

¹⁵ Outline adapted from John and Janie Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women*, (), 106.

2. Recurring headaches, feelings of anxiety, insomnia, nausea, or general awful feelings when there has been an extended absence of the chemical, which causes the heart to be strongly attracted to and lust for more (Proverbs 23:29-31). Note: A doctor should be consulted when the drug of choice has made the person unable to function without it. While the Bible has much to say about the cause and solution for addiction, we must also acknowledge that those who are chemically dependent may also need a physicians help to be able to function without the drug. However, no longer being physically addicted does not deal with the main issue in addiction.
3. Disregard for adverse personal consequences of the chemical, such as dullness, distortion or denial or reality, loss of judgment, and the entertainment of perverse thoughts (Proverbs 23:32- 33; see also 31:4-5).
4. Determined desire for repeated experiences with the chemical regardless of the physical and emotional instability that it engenders (Proverbs 23:34).
5. An insensitivity to the mistreatment of others, frequent arguments and fights with family members or friends (Proverbs 23:35).
6. Occasional and temporary blackouts, forgetfulness, or memory loss that contributes to insecurity and uncertainty (Proverbs 23:35).
7. Ongoing demanding desire to use the chemical of choice in order to relax or sleep, to be happy or content, to resolve personal problems, or to just simply feel “normal” (Proverbs 23:35).
 - a) Kurt Cobain (lead singer for Nirvana) said that he used heroin as a way to deal with his untreatable stomach pain. He was not merely in an addictions trap, but was in a “chaotic lifestyle fed by a need to physical relief, overwhelming pressure from the expectations of others, a history of turmoil, and traveling in a world where drugs were readily available and abuse almost expected.”¹⁶ Kurt

¹⁶ Andy Farmer, *Trapped: Getting Free from People, Patterns and Problems*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 121.

himself said, “Like all drugs, after a few months it’s just as boring as breathing air.”¹⁷

b) Questions to ask to get to the root of the behavior

•Why do you want to drink this alcoholic beverage? •Are you avoiding emotional pain? •Are you wanting to “escape” from the troubles of real life? •Why do you want to take this prescription medication when you are not really in serious physical pain? •Is it because you want to glorify God or is it because you are looking for a temporary fix?

VI. How Should We Think about Treatment?

A) According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, counseling has been proven helpful and effective in assisting people away from addiction.¹⁸ We believe that the most effective form of counseling for those battling addiction is based from the Scriptures.

B) A New Heart

1. Since we understand the nature of addiction to be a moral issue, the solution is as well. Change begins when the individual understands the truth about God, themselves, sin, and the good news of the gospel.
2. God created mankind in his image, to worship and love Him. However, at the Fall, humanity rebelled against God, and is consequently corrupt. The consequence of that corruption is incessant idolatry. Mankind cannot turn from or change to worshipping God on his own. Therefore, humanity has two great needs.

¹⁷ Ibid, 122.

¹⁸ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, <https://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, (May 15 2017).

First, there is the need to be forgiven of the sin and reconciled to God. Second, there is the need of a new heart.

3. Motivated by his own mercy, God provides humanity with the two great needs; forgiveness and a new heart. God stepped out of heaven, became a man (Jesus Christ), lived the perfect life of worship, and then offered himself as the only sufficient payment for humanity's sin. Through his death on the cross, Christ absorbed the wrath of God due our sin so that we may stand forgiven and righteous in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; Titus 3:3-7). By faith in Christ, we receive forgiveness, righteousness, and reconciliation to God (Eph. 2:8-9, Phil. 3:7). Additionally, God grants the individual the new heart such that they are made a new creature who progressively loves, serves, and worships God (2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:10). The power of the Christ crucified and resurrected is the only power sufficient to transform humanity. True change begins when the individual puts faith in the Jesus of the Bible for salvation. As Jesus said, "So if the Son sets makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).
4. Regarding the new heart, Mark Shaw writes, "The Greek word the Bible often uses for 'heart' is 'kardia,' figuratively defined as 'the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors.' The Bible teaches that the spiritual heart of a person is the essence of that person and will live forever in eternity."¹⁹ This heart has to be changed from the inside out. Second Corinthians 5:17 teaches that, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." The addict can change their behavior. Many people have turned from their addiction and gone on to other things. However, it does not make a difference in eternity if they do not have a changed heart.
5. The consequences of receiving the new heart are immense. For one, the addict no longer remains a slave to their sin (Romans 6:1-14). Instead, the grace of God

¹⁹ Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective* (Kindle Locations 305-308). Focus Publishing. Kindle Edition.

through the new heart causes them to be enslaved to God, living a life pleasing to him (Romans 6:21-22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

6. They must turn from the worship of the substance to the worship of God. The biblical gospel is the central issue that needs to be addressed with those in addiction. One must understand and embrace that God is perfect and holy. He is our creator and as such demands and deserves all our praise and worship. Since we have sinned against God, our punishment for any and all sin is an eternity in hell (Revelation 20:11-14).

7. As described above, all addiction is idolatry; the worship of something other than God. Once a person bows the knee to Christ they are able to begin the process of growth away from the addiction, the bondage of sin. The solution of all addiction is the progressive change in the life of the person into the image of Christ. This process, called progressive sanctification, will be consequent of the individual who receives the new heart by faith in Christ (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; Col 1:22; Titus 2:11-14).
 - a) Philippians 2:12-13, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.
 - b) Colossians 1:22, “yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.
 - c) Titus 2:11-14, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

8. When God saves someone, that person is now a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). Being something different, they are to live different lives than before. The grace of God saves to change lives not to keep them the same. The good news is that even those trapped in addictions can and will change.
9. **Appendix #1 - Three Tree Diagram**

B) Biblical Process for Change

1. Change takes time and is a long process. For those entrenched with these habits, it may take years to overcome. As God is patient with us, so too must we show great love and patience with others during their change process.
2. However, “It does not take years for you to become repentant and obedient to God. Repentance is immediate and decisive. ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ You can live the peaceful, forgiven, and abundant life of the kingdom of God right now because it is at your fingertips.”²⁰
3. “Repentance is a repeated process of decisions that you make. It is a two-fold, continuing process of: 1. Making decisions daily that deny your selfish, sinful desires, 2. Accepting God’s commands for actions that please Him.”²¹ Or you could say that repentance is a turning from sin and turning towards God.
4. Prodigal son – Luke 15
5. Put Off and Put On - Ephesians 4:20-24 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - a) Ephesians 4:20-24, “But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in His, just as the truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be

²⁰ Mark E. Shaw, *The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective*, (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing. Kindle Edition), Kindle Locations 2477-2479.

²¹ Ibid.

renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

- b) 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

	Step 1 ²²	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Ephesians 4:20-24	Learned Christ (v.20-21)	Put-Off (v.22)	Renewed in the Spirit of Your Mind (v.23)	Put-On (v.24)
2 Timothy 3:16	Doctrine	Reproof	Correction	Instruction in Righteousness
Explanation	Standard set by your Creator found in His Word	Falling short of that Standard, this is the part of your former life of sinful habits to be discarded	Holy Spirit provides power to transform with new attitude and new ability to please God	Practical application of righteousness of Christ that now meets God’s standard!

6. Appendix #1 Three Tree Diagram –

7. Biblical Habits - Y-Diagram

- a) Galatians 6:7-8 “Do no be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from

²² Mark Shaw, Rachael Bailey, Bethany Spence, *Eating Disorders: Help for Hungering Souls*, (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing), 17.

the flesh reap corruption, but the one sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit
reap eternal life.”

- b) Prov 13:15, “Good understanding produces favor, but the way of the
treacherous is hard.”

c) The local church: God’s plan for change

- 1. Preaching of the Word of God

- i. Acts 20:20, 27
- ii. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

2. Community

- a) Accountability – “Loneliness is a place where we are vulnerable to the temptations of the enemy and prone to make poor and sinful choices.”²³

- i. Hebrews 3:10:23-35
- ii. Hebrews 3:12-15

- b) Discipleship

- i. Colossians 1:28
- ii. Romans 15:14
- iii. Ephesians 4:11-16

3. Counseling

- a) Group: CHANGE

- i. Weekly group meeting as well as one individual counseling appointment each week for at a minimum of 12 weeks. Group and individual meetings are not intended to last forever. The amount of time spent in CHANGE and in counseling will be determined on each person’s needs and process in the program. While we understand that time is required for anyone with an addiction to see lasting change, we also believe that once someone has been transformed by Christ and has been given a new heart, that the

²³ Mark Shaw, *Relapse: Biblical Prevention Strategies*, (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2011), 11.

journey from addiction to obedience to God begins right away. The more time and effort put in will determine the time in CHANGE.

- ii. During the group meetings each week a group facilitator will be discussing the biblical principles found in Mark Shaw's book *Replase*. Each person will be encouraged to read the chapter and complete the accompanying workbook for that week. After book is completed, the facilitator will begin teaching through the workbook *The Heart of Addiction*.
- iii. Each participant will also be encouraged to attend the Sunday gathering at Cornerstone Church in addition to a Gospel Community group. CHANGE as well as individual counseling is one part of the transformation process out of an addiction. Integration into a local church is God's way of complete and total change. Many times people will wonder why they have not changed as much as they should be. Often the answer is due to their lack of commitment to a New Testament local church. The church is the greenhouse for change (Heb. 3:12-19, 10:23-25) and neglecting it will lead to a falling back into one's addiction. Immersing oneself in the loving, biblical community of the local church will help foster growth into a life pleasing to God.
- iv. Scripture teaches that each person struggling to rid themselves of any addiction also is called by God to become a functioning member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:14-20). Each saved individual has unique skills and gifts that can be contributed for the benefit of the body. Therefore, the counselor will help each person find a practical way to serve, as they are able.
- v. Counseling will discontinue once the counselor has determined that the individual has been transformed by the grace of God through obedience to the Word of God. Though formal addictions counseling may terminate,

each participant will be put in a discipleship relationship with someone else in the body of Christ.

b) Individual

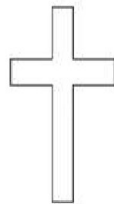
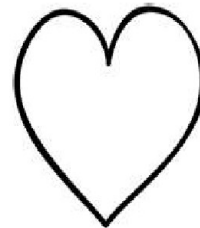
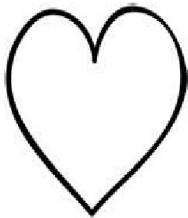
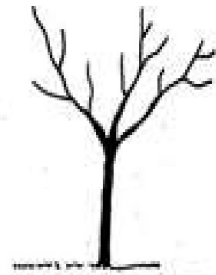
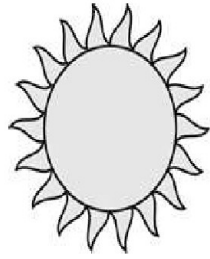
- i. During weekly individual counseling, the counselor will discuss the biblical principles from the group meeting and help the counselee learn how to apply God's Word. The counselor will use "God's Solutions to Life's Problems" by Wayne Mack as a guide for counseling. Change is progressive and not automatic. Any change takes effort on one's part to put off sin and to walk in righteousness. While God is at work and changes the individual, he/she is called to also put forth effort (Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Cor. 9:27; Col. 1:29; Eph. 4:25-32). To help in grasping this concept, we can look to the example of a farmer. He must work hard to plow the field, to weed it, to plant the seeds, to water the field, to cultivate it, however, the farmer cannot force the plant to grow. So it is in the Christian life. We must work hard to obey God but He will cause the growth.
- ii. In addition to reading the above books, each person will also be assigned portions of the Bible to read each day (Ps. 119:24; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) since it is only the Word that helps us to experience true change and freedom (2 Pet. 1:3-4; Ps. 119:11). They will also be memorizing certain Bible verses that pertain to their own struggle (Ps. 119:11). A portion of the Bible reading time each day will specifically be focused on praying to God to change them (Ps. 119:18). Coupled with the reading of the Word must be prayer to God. We cannot live without air. Nor can we change without prayer. Prayer shows that we are reliant on the Spirit for help. If we do not pray, then we should not expect to change.

c) Additional resources

- i. The Addiction Connection <http://www.theaddictionconnection.org/>
- ii. The Heart of Additction by Mark Shaw
- iii. Relapse by Mark Shaw
- iv. Addiction Proof Parenting by Mark Shaw

- v. Understanding Temptation by Mark Shaw
- vi. Vision of Hope treatment center for women in Lafayette IN.
- vii. Addiction: A Banquet at the Grave by Ed Wlech
- viii. Crossroads by Ed Welch
- ix. God's Solutions to Life's Problems by Wayne Mack

Appendix #1



Appendix # 2

Teton County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Statistics

Statistics in Green are lower than the Wyoming average; Statistics in Red are above the Wyoming average.

Children and Adolescents:¹

33% of 12th Graders report binge drinking during the past two weeks (**highest rate in WY**). 22% of 10th Graders report binge drinking in the past two weeks (**second highest rate in WY**).

55% of 12th Graders report alcohol use in the past 30 days (**third highest rate in WY**), 45% of 10th Graders report alcohol use in the past 30 days (**second highest rate in WY**) and 4% of 6th Graders report alcohol use in the past 30 days.

29% of 12th Graders reported marijuana use in the past 30 days (**second highest rate in WY**). 22% of 10th Graders reported marijuana use in the past 30 days (**second highest rate in WY**). 2% of 8th Graders reported marijuana use in the past 30 days.

52% of 10th Graders and 43% of 12th Graders report friends' use of drugs. (**both rates are highest in WY**)

86% of 12th Graders and 75% of 10th Graders attended a community event during the past 12 months where adults were drunk or intoxicated. (**both rates are highest in WY**)

Adults:²

9% of Adults report a Heavy Drinking pattern in the past month. (**highest rate in WY**)

Alcohol and Crime in Teton County:³

45% of Domestic Violence arrests in Teton Co. are alcohol related.

88% of all arrests in Teton Co. are alcohol related (**2nd in WY**)

55% of Assault charges in Teton Co. are alcohol related.

31% of all arrests in Teton Co. are for Public Intoxication. (**2nd in WY**)

48% of all arrests in Teton Co. are for DUI (**2nd in WY**).

7% of all arrests in Teton County involve drugs.

¹ WYSAC. (2014). The 2014 Wyoming Prevention Needs Assessment: Canen, E. L., Hime, S.J., & Chavez, B.L. (2014). The 2014 Wyoming Prevention Needs Assessment: State of Wyoming Profile Report (WYSAC Technical Report No. CHES-1444). Laramie, WY: University of Wyoming Center.

² WYSAC. (2014). *Wyoming Community Epidemiological Outcomes Epidemiological Profile*, by E. L. Canen, B. L. Chavez, R. A. Wambert Report No. CHES-1427). Laramie, WY: Wyoming Survey & Analysis

³ WASCOP. (2015). *Alcohol and Crime in Wyoming 2014* by Johnson and Chiefs of Police. Douglas, WY: Johnson and Associates.

Prevention Management Organization of Wyoming



Matt Stech, MS, LPC

Community Prevention Professional

Email: mstech@pmowyo.org

Cell: (307) 413-6333

Office: (307) 264-1536

Fax: (307) 264-1537

Web Site: www.pmowyo.org

Location: 140 East Broadway, Suite B2

P.O. Box 1397, Jackson, WY 83001

Appendix #3

An Analysis of Celebrate Recovery By Eric Davis and Matt Mumma

Enslaving behaviors are as old, and common to humanity, as sin itself. Since our fall at the dawn of time, we have been naturally enslaved to every destructive behavior possible. In response, various efforts have been made to deal with the problem.

One such effort is a packaged addictions program called Celebrate Recovery (CR). John Baker and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church created the program in 1991 to help people with various addictions. Rick Warren writes, “[D]uring the ten-week series that I preached to kick off this program, our attendance grew by over 1500!” (John Baker, *Celebrate Recovery Leader’s Guide*, 12). During the past 25 years, some 20,000 churches in the United States have reportedly used CR, with some 2.5 million people having completed the program. Needless to say, CR has had a major influence on the church.

CR’s stated purpose is “to encourage fellowship and to celebrate God’s healing power in our lives as we work our way along the road to recovery” (21). Further, Warren claims that CR is “more effective in helping people change than anything else I’ve seen or heard of” (12).

Generally, the program runs on a one-year repeating schedule. Participants are taken through the material in 25 lessons and testimonies, meeting once per week for 52 weeks. Rick Warren writes that CR was born when “I began an intense study of the Scriptures to discover what God had to say about ‘recovery.’ To my amazement, I found the principles of recovery—in their logical order—given by Christ in His most famous message, the Sermon on the Mount” (12). More specifically, CR teaches that the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), which are said to be “eight ways to be happy,” contain the progressive path to addiction recovery.

The eight principles upon which CR is derived are as follows (the principle is stated, followed by the corresponding Beatitude):

The Road to Recovery

1. Realize I’m not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable. (Step 1) “Happy are those who know that they are spiritually poor” (Matt. 5:3, though the CR manual cites these verses as the NIV, they are all taken from the GNT).
2. Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him and that He has the power to help me recover. (Step 2) “Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4).
3. Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control. (Step

- 3) “Happy are the meek” (Matt. 5:5).
4. Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust. (Steps 4 and 5) “Happy are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8).
5. Voluntarily submit to any and all changes God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects. (Steps 6 and 7) “Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires” (Matt. 5:6).
6. Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I’ve done to others when possible, except when to do so would harm them or others. (Steps 8 and 9) “Happy are the merciful” (Matt. 5:7).
“Happy are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).
7. Reserve a time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will. (Steps 10 and 11) (no verse cited).
8. Yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and my words. (Step 12) “Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires” (Matt. 5:10).

Clever readers will notice that the first letter from each of the eight steps forms the acronym, “recovery.” CR’s approach takes each of the eight principles and expounds them with a few lessons, forming the 25 lessons in which participants are guided through how to deal with their “hurts, hang-ups, and habits” (the oft-used phrase in CR to describe our problems which need recovery).

Since CR claims to be Christian in nature, “biblical” (13), grounded in God’s word (12), and “[b]ased on the actual words of Jesus rather than on psychological theory” (12), it deserves to be evaluated as such. This review is based upon the program’s teaching as stated in the CR Leadership Guide only (pages cited are from this guide) and is not a critique of every person who has participated in the program. Further, the purpose of this review is not to question whether the 2.5 million participants have felt that they were assisted with enslaving behaviors, nor to doubt the sincerity of individuals seeking to help, but, instead, to examine CR’s claim to be biblically based.

Having said that, this review (completed largely with the help of Matthew Mumma) will demonstrate that CR contains two major problems: (1) Though claiming to be biblically based, its teachings are often constructed from a misuse of Scripture and an erroneous hermeneutic. (2) Though claiming to be Christian based, its theology often clashes with sound Christian theology.

1. Many of CR’s teachings are constructed from a misuse of Scripture and an erroneous hermeneutic.

The clearest instance of this occurs in the principles upon which CR is founded. CR’s

“Road to Recovery” begins with the “Eight Principles Based on the Beatitudes” (12), stated above. Thus, CR claims that the Beatitudes are principles for addiction recovery. This interpretation, however, incorrectly understands the Beatitudes by removing them out of their context and interpreting them in an eisegetical manner. As such, CR imposes a meaning other than the authorial intent upon the text. When Christ preached the Beatitudes, he did not intend for them to be a protocol for recovery. Neither are they “ways to be happy” (12). Instead, the Beatitudes are descriptions of kingdom citizens; of individuals having been saved by God’s grace. Commentators agree that the Beatitudes describe the common characteristics of true believers (e.g. John Blanchard, 54; James Boice, 74; D.A. Carson, 128, 132; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 1:24; Charles Quarles, 39). Jesus begins this great sermon by turning the common understanding of those in God’s favor on its head. The Pharisees, who largely set the religious/spiritual tone of the day, would have propagated the photo-negative of the Beatitudes, and, thus, an incorrect understanding of the believer. For this reason, Jesus brings clarity to the scene with these corrections.

Specifically, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3) is not a recovery principle, teaching that “I’m not God...powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable” (9). Instead, Jesus teaches that one certain evidence of the true believer is a poverty of spirit. The word “poor” was used to describe abject poverty and a raggedly covered (if covered at all) beggar, cowered over with head down and hand out (TDNT, 6:886), while “in spirit” refers to our moral/spiritual state. The idea is that the sinner has come to terms with God’s towering moral standards for humanity; absolute perfection (cf. Matt. 5:48). Further, he understands that, having rebelliously and flagrantly violated God’s holy law, he deserves to endure the righteous wrath of God in hell for eternity. Thus, he comes to God, as nothing more than a head down, hand out, moral beggar, with zero moral/spiritual contribution to God except sin. Being morally filthy, the sinner depends entirely on God’s mercy if he is going to be acceptable to God. So, Matthew 5:3 does not teach a principle for recovering from addictions, but that true believers understand that they cannot earn God’s favor from their impressive moral wealth, but have only earned his wrath by their offensive moral filth.

Similar problems exist with CR’s other foundational principles. For example, Matthew 5:4 does not teach that one must “earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover” (9). Instead, Jesus teaches that true believers are characterized as those who are shattered and sorrowful for having sinned against God (“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”). Matthew 5:8 does not teach that, to recover, I must “[o]penly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust” (9). The verse teaches nothing about addiction recovery nor confessing faults to myself. Rather, Jesus is teaching that true believers are characterized by a measure of spiritual and moral purity even at the level of the will and worship. And, notwithstanding the GNT, Matthew 5:6 does not say, “Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires,” but, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Thus, in addition to an imposed meaning on the text, CR often uses inadequate translations of Scripture.

So, many of the principles upon which CR rests and from which the curriculum is expounded are constructed from a misuse of Scripture and erroneous hermeneutics. Consequently, if CR intends to find a protocol for recovery, they will need to look somewhere other than the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

CR errs elsewhere in its use of Scripture. Often words taken from the realm of psychology are used in place of God's word to describe sin. For example, terms such as "co-dependent," "addiction," and "abusing" (167) of substances are not found in Scripture. One reason is because those terms are not God's way of describing those behaviors.

Instead, Scripture describes addictions in terms of sinful enslavement to ones lusts and pleasures and lovers of pleasure (e.g. Rom. 6:12-13 , Eph. 2:3 , 2 Tim. 3:4). One who is addicted to, or practices the abuse of, alcohol, for example, is best referred to as a drunkard or drunkenness (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:10 ,Gal. 5:21). God made no mistakes in the inspiration of his word (cf. Prov. 30:5-6 , 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, it is best for us to use his Spirit-given terms when describing all things, whether sins or blessings. CR misuses Scripture in its teaching of forgiveness. For example, the assertion is made that since we have been forgiven by God, we must forgive ourselves (193). Matthew 22:39 ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself") is used to support the assertion.

The question is posed, "Now, how can you love or forgive your neighbor, if you can't love or forgive yourself?" (193). Jesus is not implying, much less teaching, self-love or self-forgiveness there. On the contrary, much of our sinfulness is excessive self-love (more on this in tomorrow's post). The idea is not that self-love and self-forgiveness is the gate to love others, but to love others as much as we effortlessly do ourselves. Additionally, the idea of forgiving oneself is an unbiblical idea not found in Scripture, thus one that Christians must reject. Forgiveness is a transaction between parties when the offended releases the offender from an infraction. While we can sin against other people, all of our sin is against the One to whom we are culpable; God. Thus, forgiveness is needed from God, not ourselves.

Though claiming to be biblically based, many of CR's teachings are constructed from a misuse of Scripture and an erroneous hermeneutic. Consequently, participants are not shepherded in an accurate handling of God's word. One likely objection may be, "So many people have been helped by CR. How can one criticize something that works so well?" We do not doubt that people have received help from CR in curbing addictions. In some measure, that is a good thing. However, the objection hinges on the definition of "works well" and "people being helped." Further, should something that misinterprets God's word and errs theologically be so justified?

2. Much of CR's theology clashes with sound Christian theology. Several examples will be examined here.

God

CR generally teaches a view of God lower than that of Scripture. For example, according to CR, God seems to not be sovereign over the hurt we experience in our lives. "You

need to understand and believe that the harm others did to you was from their free will. It was their choice, not God's. It was not God's will" (192). Certainly those who hurt others certainly make an active choice to do so, for which they are culpable. And, sin against others is not God's prescribed will. However, the lack of clarity with respect to God's decretive will is troubling. Though being sinned against can be painful, we must say with Scripture, "In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other" (Eccles. 7:14). CR lacks clarity here, while failing to teach that we can trust the love and wisdom of God who is sovereign over all of our battles.

CR teaches that God is an unsovereign bystander in our salvation. Man's salvation is up to his own will power. The sinner chooses God (11-13, 85, 90, 105-106, 167). "He loved us so much that He gave us a free will" (192). This clashes with Scripture, which teaches the sovereign grace of God in sinners' salvation (e.g. John 3:3-8 , 6:44 ; Rom. 8:29-30 , 9:15-16 ;Eph. 1:4-5).

Additionally, CR teaches that God must be forgiven by the addict. Baker writes, "[O]n your list of 'others to forgive,' you might have forgotten about someone you may need to forgive; God. Yes, you heard me right. God" (192). No such thing can be found anywhere in Scripture. Now, CR teaches that God cannot and does not sin. However, elsewhere, forgiveness is described as a letting go and that "forgiving your enemy sets you one above him" (192). So, where does forgiving God place us in relation to him? Such teaching suggests that God is somehow accountable to man, thus dethroning him from his glorious position of Sovereign Lord and King (cf. Ps. 93:1-2).

Finally, in an inappropriate AA parallel, CR repeatedly refers to Christ as the sinner's "Higher Power." While it is a good start to mention him as the "only Higher Power" (41), the terminology does not go far enough in capturing Scripture's teaching on Christ. Worse, the phrase too closely parallels AA's reference to a subjective god of man's making. Christ is not a power that is higher, but the omnipotent, uncreated, eternally existing I AM, God, Creator, and sustainer of all things who. Incredibly, he loved sinners, demonstrated by absorbing the righteous anger of God due them (John 1:1-3 , 8:58 ; Col. 1:16-17 ; Heb. 1:3 ; 1 John 4:10).

Even more, CR's view of Christ is parochial: far more than the "Higher Power" who helps me in my recovery, he is the King of kings whom I am to worship (Phil. 2:10) and the only Savior through whom man can be acceptable before holy God (John 14:6 , 1 Tim. 2:5-6). Yet, in the brief references to Christ now and then, CR does not speak of him in these terms.

Humanity and the Problem

In CR, man is reduced to an addicted creature with "hurts, hang-ups, and habits." However, Scripture teaches that every person is a worshipping creature, made in the image of God for the glory of God. In CR, what defines man is his addictions and culpability to his self-actualization. In Scripture, what defines man is his image bearing and culpability to God (Gen. 1:26-27).

CR teaches that humanity is not entirely dead in sin, but capable, by his will, of choosing God in salvation (11-13, 85, 90, 105-6, 167, 192). Humanity's problem is often described as a low self-esteem, low self-love, and the need for self-forgiveness (167-8). For example, Baker writes that the root of his enslavement to alcohol was low self-esteem (14) and a "lack of positive self-image" (167). This lack of self-esteem is taught to be the root of all sin from which other negative behaviors arise (167). Such lack of positive self-image is what causes an individual to engage in addictive behaviors. Therefore, CR teaches that humanity's deepest problem from which all sin springs has to do with selfimage and self-esteem.

The problems with CR's understanding of man and his problems are numerous. First, man is fundamentally an image-bearer of God, created to worship him (Gen. 1:26-27 , Isa. 43:7). However, all humanity since the Fall of Adam and Eve are conceived with a sinful nature, which is incessantly hostile towards the true God (Rom. 3:10-18). Consequently, with the full capacity and desire to worship remaining, our hearts (the seat of our will) rebelliously cling to and crave created things in worship over and above God (Rom. 1:18-23). The product is as bad as it gets: man is both relentlessly religious and entirely sinful. Thus, in our natural state, we are relentless idolaters, in constant violation of our great obligation, privilege, and purpose to worship God with the full capacity of our hearts. To be sure, it is not simply the drunkard or drug user (as I once was) who are addicts. All humanity are addicts: motivated by love for self and enmity towards God, we are rebelliously enslaved to give loyalty to anything except God. Consequently, some worship alcohol and its effects; others, food; still others, things like body image, sex, money, reputation, kids' performances, comfort, exercise, approval, and moral performance.

However, underneath all idolatry is not low self-love, but the contrary: we worship idols out of an extreme devotion to self. Thus, self-esteem is not the answer. As somewhat of a case study to prove the point, God has recorded for us a tragic-comical moment in history, displaying the product of man's high self-esteem. At the Tower of Babel, man's self-esteem drove him to build praise for himself by attempting to construct a tower so high that, perhaps, he could not only avoid another flood, but look God in the eye so as to self-cure his proud inferiority complex (cf. Gen. 11:4). We know how that ended.

At no time does God's word instruct us to better love ourselves. In fact, quite the opposite. Paul warns Timothy that one symptom of increasingly unchecked human depravity is that "men will be lovers of self" (2 Tim. 3:2). Our problem is not that we are poor self-lovers with "hurts, hang-ups, and habits that didn't work" (74), but, being lords of self, we feed ourselves with whatever idol will soothe, exalt, please, praise, comfort, venerate, and prefer self. Man is naturally a colossal lover of self, adoring and worshipping himself. Sons of Adam naturally loathe and resent any threat to his self-rule and self-exaltation.

Contrary to CR's teaching, character defects are the consequence of our sinful selfdevotion (Prov. 4:23 , Jer. 17:9 , Mark 7:14-23 , Gal. 5:19-21 , James 1:14-15

). We are dead to God, unwilling and unable to please him in this state (Eph. 2:1-3). Without ever having to be taught or conditioned, every human being is born in extraordinary religious devotion to the ante-Luke 10:27-28 , loving the lord himself, with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his strength, and all his mind, and hating his neighbor as much as he loves himself.

Therefore, man is in gross violation of God's good and holy moral requirements (Rom. 3:23). Our due punishment corresponds to the greatness of the One whom he has violated. As such, we deserve to endure the righteous wrath of God for eternity (2 Thess. 1:8-9 , Rev. 20:11-15). A boost in self-esteem will only compound the problem. We may feel better, but we remain incessant self-worshippers, facing eternity in hell. Tragically, CR omits virtually all of these truths on the nature and standing of humanity, thus, harming its participants and setting itself up for an anemic gospel.

Salvation

In CR, salvation is recovery from addictive behavior. CR's process of salvation could be captured as follows: man is an addicted being beset with hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Through CR, he learns to manage his hurts, hang-ups, and habits through forgiving God, others, and himself, belief in the Higher Power, Jesus Christ, and improved self-love and self-esteem. The curbing of the addictions and enthusiastic involvement in CR demonstrates his healing. He continues involvement in CR, as a "believer who struggles with [insert addiction]."

When CR describes the event of salvation, man is in charge as he chooses God. God must be permitted to act (166, 170). The word repentance is mentioned, being described as taking God's point of view on our lives over our own, while turning away from our sins and turning towards God (107). This was one of the high-points of the book. However, the event of salvation can be triggered by the sinner praying a formulaic prayer to accept Christ.

In all of the testimonies in the book, few, if any, contained the true gospel. They go back to the moment in time they prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, sat in CR for the first time, or experienced healing from addiction. CR's gospel is addiction recovery. The problems here are significant. Our needs are more serious than CR teaches. First, our need is not to recover from an addiction, but to be forgiven our infinite sin debt (Rom. 4:7-8). God's law brings focus to our condemnation before God (Rom. 3:19-20). Our only hope is that he might respond to our cry of mercy by forgiving our infinite debt so as to remove the hell we deserve.

Second, our need is reconciliation to God (Isa. 59:2). By nature and deed, we are his sworn enemies (Rom. 5:10). In our incessant idolatry, we are in perpetual rebellion against him. To remain there would mean eternal hell.

Third, our need is a righteousness with which we can stand acceptable to our Creator, not a few principles to assist with addictions (Phil. 3:9). Man's problem of the ages is not addictions but a woefully inadequate righteousness before God.

Fourth, our need is an entire change of nature (John 3:3 , 5). More than recovery from poor behavior, we are in desperate need of a new heart that worships Christ, not cravings (2 Cor. 5:17). Since our problem stems from worship, we need to be repaired at that deepest level so as to be willing and able to please God.

Fifth, man's need is not to love himself, but loathe himself. Christ presented self-hate as necessary for following him (Luke 14:26 , cf. 2 Cor. 7:10-11). In fact, in a passage which describes the future salvation of Israel, God describes the consequence of receiving his grace of regeneration by the Holy Spirit as follows: "...you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in our own sight for your iniquities and your abominations" (Ezek. 36:31). So, a recovery to spiritual health (if we might put it in such terms) will not look like a greater self-love, but self-loathing. By nature, we so crave our own lordship, that it takes nothing less than the power of Almighty God in regeneration to pry our self-venerating claws off the throne of our hearts and place himself there.

Of course, the problem with these needs is that we are incapable of providing them for ourselves. If God does not act, we are hopelessly lost. We may be able to rotate idols so as to appear more socially acceptable, but we would remain condemned idolaters before God, headed for a miserable eternity. CR attempts to present a system of salvation recovery, while, tragically, failing to address these greatest of man's needs. A possible consequence of self-esteem theology is he externally assures himself with Bible verses and Christian principles, but remains an incessant self-worshiper under the banner of Christianity. He remains his own lord, but has recruited an unbiblical Jesus to assist in his self-centered agenda.

Unlike CR's teaching, it is with self-denial, not self-love, that we come to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance, and not for mere behavioral recovery, but reconciliation to God (Luke 9:23). Salvation is more than belief in Jesus for addiction therapy. Christ, being fully God, stepped out of heaven, became a man, and lived a perfect life in full obedience in thought, word, and deed, to the requirements of God's law (Gal. 4:4-5). At no time was he sinfully enslaved to idols. Instead, he worshiped God perfectly (Heb. 4:15). Motivated by his own mercy, he willingly went to the cross where he suffered and died, bowing under the righteous wrath of God due us, so as to eliminate our condemnation (John 10:17-18 ; 1 John 4:10 ; 1 Pet. 2:24). He was then raised for our justification and ascended to heaven as exalted Lord (Rom. 4:25 , Heb. 12:2). Man is called then to repent of his sin and surrender to Christ as Lord (Acts 17:30-31). By faith in Christ, God counts the penalty for all our sin to have been served in the death of Christ, while simultaneously counting us righteous in Christ, so as to be at peace with him (Rom. 5:1 , 2 Cor. 5:21).

Contrary to CR's teaching, salvation occurs, not by man's permission, but God's sovereign act of grace on the dead sinner (John 6:44 , 65). By his mercy, he causes the supernatural work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, in which a new nature is given (John 3:3-7 , Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and accomplished by the power of the

Spirit through the instrumentality of the word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Spirit, responds in faith to the gospel (Eph. 1:13-14). That is the good news of God’s grace in Christ, which meets humanity’s greatest need.

The Risk of Promoting False Assurance

But CR risks promoting false assurance of salvation. A few pages into the CR Leader’s Guide, an unbiblical view of salvation is purported in the author’s testimony. He writes, “I asked Christ into my heart at age thirteen” (14), then describes nearly two decades of no fruit bearing. However, the writer asserts, “I knew that if I died I was saved, but my Christianity was not reflected in my lifestyle, business practices, and priorities” (15). Though perhaps unintentionally, this immediately sets the stage in CR for a view of salvation that does not square with Scripture. Jesus taught, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit...I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:2 , 5). “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). Contrary to the author’s testimony, Scripture gives no assurance to individuals who persist in a life without fruit bearing (cf. Eph. 2:10 , 1 John 2:3-6).

Additional false assurance is risked with addiction-recovery akin to salvation in CR. With little to no teaching on man’s incessant idolatry and violation of God’s holy law, the consequent punishment of hell, and the need for justification, CR endangers its participants. If a CR participant says a prayer, affirms belief in Jesus, and experiences behavioral improvement, assurance is given. However, it’s possible to have swept the soul clean, leaving it unoccupied by the Spirit (Luke 11:24-26).

Sanctification

CR teaches that the path to change is to “let go and let God” (17, 95, 166). By embracing the eight foundation principles, change is expected to occur (142). Growth and lasting change seem to be centered on perpetual CR attendance. Cessation of attendance and working through the 8 Principles and 12 Steps is not suggested (167).

Scripture offers a more comprehensive, promising transformation in the process of sanctification (Rom. 8:29-30). God’s work is not limited to perpetual addiction recovery, but conforming the whole soul into christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18). And, contrary to CR, enslavements no longer affix to the identity of God’s children. Such things were we (1 Cor. 6:11). But, by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit, we are not merely getting help with hurts, hang-ups, and habits, but putting our entire sin nature to death (Rom. 8:13-14 , Col. 3:5). Through regular immersion in the means of grace (e.g. biblical preaching, Scripture reading, prayer, repentance, one another), the Spirit ministers transforming love to the soul. However, the means of grace are not mentioned in CR. Instead, the CR program is the means of grace. But, with incorrect interpretations of Scripture and erroneous theology, both salvation and sanctification are hindered.

The Church

In psychology's teaching, deep-seated problems can be solved only by the professional counselor's therapy. In AA, enslavement is treated through perpetual AA involvement. CR parallels both, in that the enslavement is treated through perpetual recovery in the CR system of therapy.

Participants are functionally taught to put faith in the CR system. Christ is mentioned as the "Higher Power," but only in name. Little is said about his attributes, deity, righteousness, and sin-bearing work. Instead, CR participants are, perhaps inadvertently, conditioned to depend on the packaged methods and ideas of the program. In reality, then, since individuals are addicts in perpetual recovery, they cannot survive apart from the CR system. Thus, CR replaces Christ's institution, the church.

Furthermore, the goal is to feel "safe at Celebrate Recovery" (73). I am guessing that CR's creators are not attempting to replace Christ's church, but, with this approach, they risk doing so. It's as if CR says, "Well, for those battling with addictions, Christ's church is not quite adequate for you. You need something more. What you need is what we have created; Celebrate Recovery." Shepherding is through perpetual CR attendance (29, 37, 59, 167-8). One's choice of a local church is irrelevant (59, 167-8). While attending a church is mentioned as good idea, it is not promoted as necessary (242). Baker writes, "If you aren't ready to get involved in your church, that's your decision" (146). So, CR participants need not come under the shepherding and accountability of biblically qualified elders for God's best kind of care. Instead, they may perpetually remain in CR and assured that all is well. Even so, CR claims that "[Jesus] is the rock, the foundation, of the Celebrate Recovery program" (29).

Consequently, it cannot be concluded that Christ is the head or foundation of CR. As a program which misuses Scripture, whose theology is erroneous, and replaces the church, it brings itself under another head.

However, if Christ is a sufficient God, then that one organism which he builds must also be the sufficient organism to shepherd broken and enslaved people. Christ taught that he builds and blesses one institution; the church (Matt. 16:18). CR, however, suggests that one can be devoted to Christ yet detached from the church. We would be hard pressed to suggest saving union with Christ while indifferent union with his Bride (Eph. 5:25-27 , Rev. 19:7), Body (Eph. 1:22-23), and flock (John 21:15-17). The individual with indifferent involvement in the local church should probably not be encouraged to be a better Christian, but evangelized to become one.

Those in CR who are not actively involved (or encouraged to be) in a sound, New Testament local church, are deprived of God's kind of care. They risk missing out on the joy, security, and privilege of relationship with and submission to biblically qualified elders (Heb. 13:17 , 1 Pet. 5:2-3). They miss out on frequent, meaty feeding through expository preaching (1 Tim. 4:13 , 2 Tim. 4:2). They miss out on sanctification and cultivating their Spirit gifts in the context of people much different than them in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7 , 12).

Finally, we might ask, “Was there a people in biblical times who struggled with various enslavements to whom writers of Scripture ministered? If so, what did they do without CR?” Take Corinth for example. From Paul’s writings, we know people were enslaved to things like alcohol, drugs, stealing, homosexual and heterosexual sin, and other destructive behaviors (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). What was the solution? Create a special program? Christ’s local church with all her normal, often-unexciting means of grace sufficed. Go to church. Sit under Christ-crucified preaching and teaching. Get shepherded by elders. Repent of sin. Read Scripture. Take communion. Love people. Practice the one anothers. Pray. Repeat. For Paul, that was enough. Addictions are not a special set of sins requiring something more than Christ’s church.

Conclusion

When it comes to packaging an organized program, CR has done a fantastic job. Potential participants and leaders have everything they need to jump in. The program is wellstructured, creative, and contains an incredible amount of ingenious acronyms in each lesson. CR’s creators certainly have put much work and thought into the program. However, as far as a Christ-centered, biblically-based program, CR falls significantly short. Though claiming to be biblically based, its teachings are often constructed from a misuse of Scripture and an erroneous hermeneutic. Though claiming to be Christian based, its theology often clashes with sound Christian theology. Therefore, a Christian church looking to shepherd people struggling with enslaving sins should rethink using Celebrate Recovery.

Superior Alternatives to Celebrate Recovery

Those who have turned to CR in attempt to bring Christ’s love to souls ought to be commended for their desire to care. The church must do something to minister to such needs. However, there are several superior alternatives.

First, church leaders ought to equip themselves and members to counsel people biblically. No substitution exists for unrushed, rigorous training in how to accurately handle and minister the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15). It is the church’s high, exalted calling from her Lord to give herself fully to raising up mature men and women, competent in God’s word (2 Tim. 2:2). No shortcuts exists here, nor should they be sought (1 Tim. 5:22). Churches can seek outside help for such training, for example, from the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. Once a leader or two are certified, then they can train others in the church and even work towards becoming an ACBC-certified training center. Churches will not be able to construct something as quick as a CR program. But that is not a bad thing. The goal is not to get something going that appears to work, but that is biblical.

Second, several resources exist as biblical alternatives to CR. For example, the book, Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave, by Ed Welch, is a must read. Welch also created a workbook called, Crossroads, which is designed for either one-on-one counseling or a group study. Mark Shaw has a handful of resources targeted at multiple issues from a biblical perspective at theaddictionconnection.com. His books, The Heart of Addiction, and, Relapse, are great resources, as well.

Finally, let God's people trust that giving ourselves to the correct, biblically-prescribed means of grace will prove abundantly sufficient to effectively minister to the greatest of needs. May our Lord give us grace in these privileged labors.