

Descent Into Addiction (part 2)

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[0 : 00] Part of the quote that was up there during the time that you were entering the class, before the class started, from Paul Tripp, a book that he wrote recently.

Finally, the quote started, What that road looks like.

And it's helpful for us to identify that. And we see those warning signs or flags as you travel down the road. And whether there's a curve ahead or sometimes on vacation you see where there's a falling rock zone.

You have to be careful going there. And they're helpful for us to be able to see and to be prepared for what lies ahead. And so we can be ready to enter that curve or that area with a bit more caution. And so that's what these lessons, what I'm really trying to do in these few lessons on trying to identify what this path looks like. Because we are all on this journey somewhere.

[1 : 33] And hopefully, saved by God's grace and his mercy, we're still exposed to some of those dangers. But we're not in bondage to the desires that could lead us down the path the rest of the way.

We have all the resources that are ours in Jesus Christ so that we can properly evaluate, recognize, discern, and see the danger and know the path that we need to take instead.

A path that will lead to God's glory. Our lives where we can ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, which is what we heard about last week from our speaker.

And not go down that other pathway. Well, what we saw last week in Ed Welch's book, he kind of broke this journey down into about five different stages.

And that's the pattern we're following and taking a look at. So that first stage we described as that stage of where the individual is somewhat naive or takes a casual, unconcerned approach toward what he's being exposed to.

[2 : 48] So it's kind of like the guard is down, no thought about where things could end up, just kind of living for the moment, enjoying whatever's happening at that moment. And so there's no mindset toward the dangers that are out there.

Doesn't really even see them as dangers. No potential there for causing me harm, et cetera. But then he also not only denies that, but denies the potential within his or her own heart to be drawn in to those dangers, which I tend to think is even a greater danger that's there.

And I know it is for me if I go day to day thinking that really my heart is not inclined to any of those things anymore. That I'm just setting myself up for a fall.

And so I have to be careful and be alert to that. I can't be casual about the existence of sin in my own heart still. And then after this initial naive or casual mindset toward a God substitute really is what's happening here, whether it's a substance or a particular activity that the person might be becoming enslaved to.

The individual takes on thoughts and actions that are characteristic of a friendship relationship. So now he's moved a little bit further down this road. And the substance or activity is gaining more control.

[4 : 21] The person is spending more time, as you would in a friendship relationship. You've enjoyed that initial encounter. And there's been what you would think is some benefits to that relationship.

And so you want to explore it more and develop more, develop it more. And so there's more of a friendship there. And with that, there's more investment on your part, whether it's money that's invested into the activity or the substance.

There's less refusal. Say no to the substance. I mean, why would you at this point still? You're still seeing it as something very beneficial.

So there's a stronger even rationalization or defense or justification for going down this path. Again, you're not seeing any dangers whatsoever.

In fact, you're still seeing all the benefits. There are two going that direction. And so there is a greater dedication there. And then as the individual continues to cultivate that relationship, there develops even a greater esteem or what Ed Welch calls in his book an infatuation with and even for the substance or activity.

[5 : 44] You've begun to realize that, boy, this is good. This is something that's really going to pay off in my life and help me with whatever else there is and comes my way.

And they're taken in more and more by this false savior. And I think that's a good term to use because we're looking to this substance or activity to really provide something that really should come from God.

And we're pursuing that apart from God. And so actually this substance or activity is really becoming the one who provides us everything that we should be looking to God for in our lives, which is everything, anything and everything that we have comes from him.

So anything we do, anything that we receive, we can receive as from his hand or should be receiving it as from his hand. So the person is impressed with what the substance or activity is able to provide and how it delivers whenever the user takes it up.

I mean, it's right there at my hand. I can just go right there and get just what I need and will help me in this situation. When life is going difficult and bad, then I can count on that.

[7 : 06] The substance is there when I need it and it delivers what I desire. When things are going wrong in my day, I can find deliverance here. And one of the things I thought might be helpful for us, even for me, I found that, you know, reading these books, very helpful, lots of information in there.

But I thought it might be helpful to hear something from people who have become, who have gone down this journey a little bit further and how they describe some of these initial stages.

So I got a clip, a YouTube clip that I want to play for you. This is just an audio clip. And you'll see here that this is a 27-year-old individual man who is struggling with recovering, as he would call it. And there's much more to the clip than what I want to play. But in this, what we're dealing with in these first few stages is how the person has been drawn in and how it's become such an important part of their lives.

So Carol's going like this at this point to see. It's not going to work. Oh, really? Oh, how disappointing.

[8 : 32] You're trying. Okay. Well, we'll try and cue some of these things up for you next week and enter into more of a description from some firsthand descriptions of really what's taking place.

And as you go on YouTube, as most of you would know, there is a myriad of bits of information, in this case testimonials of people who are on this road and usually of people who are down here on this far end of this road.

And hearing them describe what's going on, and it really brought it, I guess, much more to light for me. As, you know, I'm one on this road, I can understand some of that struggle.

I have dealt with some individuals who are further on down this road and can understand that struggle. But as you listen to some of these testimonials, it really brings you into the situation and understanding even more the struggle that they're facing, the bondage that's there, the destruction that is there in their lives.

And as you hear or see somebody more give these kind of testimonials, it's not like, oh, man, how could you ever? It's more like you're entering in more with a compassionate heart and yearning for them, and you're just sorry for what they're going through and understanding how it is that they got there, even in this young man when he gives his testimonial of how he got started.

[10 : 17] Just one time that, hey, everybody else was doing it, and he shot up. In this case, it was drugs. And gave indication that there was nothing that ever felt so good to him than that and what he was experiencing.

And another testimonial that I read of a young girl that was just with some friends, having a good time, got started drinking, was drunk, woke up at home, her little sister next to her, kind of pushing her, trying to wake her up.

You're not dead. Don't die. And she woke up, threw up, went to the bathroom, was throwing up, and came back to the room and said, man, that was wonderful. In all seriousness, of the evening before and what she had experienced.

And we think, how does that make sense? But it's making sense to people who are going down this path. And so that we're not setting ourselves up as, here we are over here and here they are over there, and how could they ever?

We've been there. We've done some things that we know we shouldn't have done and maybe are still already. Even some of us at this point thinking of things that we wouldn't think and maybe aren't as serious as something back here that they're engaging in, but could be it's still a God substitute.

[11 : 46] What do we turn to as a God replacement in our times of upsetness or unpeacefulness or anxiety?

And where do we go? And how is it that we conclude that we are not as bad as what they're doing over here? And so we've got to understand what we're experiencing in light of that as well.

So we'll try and get some of these set up for you next week. But the individuals in this stage of infatuation, there's really this more regular use.

What used to be just two or three times a month now has become two or three times a week. So the relationship's getting stronger. More investment, more investment of money.

It's no longer undesignated funds, pocket money, whatever it is. Now it's eating into funds that would normally be used in other areas that might be priority areas.

[12 : 47] More time is invested. More time is devoted to the person's interaction with the substance or activity. The individual is beginning to take time away from other areas of life that are important, that need the investment of time.

But now he's unwilling to devote the time to activities that were important in the past. More investment in relationships.

Again, as you hear some of these testimonials, you'll see that in order for them to expand the relationship here with the substance or activity, it's going to mean an expansion of the relationship with others who are also going down that journey as well.

Others that find it acceptable and good. And turning away from relationships of people who might be recognizing where they're going and trying to encourage them to not go there.

Now they're drawing away from those relationships. But this is what the early stages of that enslavement.

[14 : 02] It's really affecting their work, their finances, their marriage, relationship, maybe with parents, church involvement certainly. But the negative consequences aren't enough to motivate change.

You know, you can say over and over again, this is where it's going, this is where it's going. But they can't put their minds, they're unwilling to put their minds around that thought and that concept that this is where it's going because of what they value over here at this point and what they're seeing, what it's really bringing to them in the present.

If they are confronted by someone who's beginning to see the changes in the person, they'll usually take up a defensive posture, either in offering excuses for what's going on in their lives or maybe shifting the blame on others.

And as I said, if it's showing up in work, now it's not their fault anything that they're doing, it's more the fault of the boss. You know, he's on me and he's making too high of demands on me for my job and my responsibilities.

He's the one that's incompetent, not me. Or if it's at home, it's my wife or my spouse. You know, they're just nagging me on and on. They won't let me alone.

[15 : 27] They don't trust me. You know, here I thought we got married and this is supposed to be a relationship of trust. So they're putting it on the other person. If it's a child with a parent, it's that the parents, they're so controlling.

Why can't they let me have some independence in my life? If it's finances and the person's not making payments that should be made, it's things at work are slow.

I don't have as much overtime money that I used to have. I'll make the payment next time, next week. I'm not going to be late, I promise. And so you're starting to hear more and more of these promises.

If it's something going on at school, I'm just not interested maybe in doing that activity anymore. Maybe it's a sport or something else that they were involved in heavily.

And now it seems there's a drawing away from that. And the coach is too demanding or I've lost interest. And maybe the grades are going down.

[16:34] So a number of things that you're beginning to see that weren't true and characteristic of the person in the past. Life is beginning to change because the infatuation, the level of infatuation that's taking place, the more that's required to devote to this substance or activity in order to get what they really want and what they really desire.

If it's a matter of alcohol, the person's now devising occasions to drink and avoids places where they can't necessarily drink. They're just looking for the opportunity to partake more and more.

If it's sexual things, the person's planning more time alone so that they can certainly be on the Internet or watch programming that feeds his or her desire and on and on we go.

So this level of infatuation, the relationship is being strengthened and developed more and more, but the person is now having to be careful to take more and more steps to cover up or hide this developing addiction that's taking place in their lives.

And as I said earlier, more justification for why it makes sense to go down this path and go in this direction. And at this point, really, they're moving into that next stage, what Ed Welch calls in his book, that of love and devotion.

[18:04] So at this point, the addiction is really expanding its turf. Let me take a break here. Any thoughts, comments, questions? That's why the other reason I thought it would be good to have a video, you sit there so nicely listening to me rattle on and on and on.

Yeah, Karen. I can't help but notice the similarities. Addiction to me could also have the word idol inserted in it.

And in a sense, our hearts are always making idols if we don't seek after God to give us our primary source of joy. Yeah. I think the difference is we think the idol is neutral in that we can walk away from it.

But truly, no idol is neutral where we can walk away without it having this grip on our hearts, this teeth of addiction that says, you thought this idol was just this innocent thing that you could go to whenever you wanted.

But really, it's developing into an addiction. Oh, definitely. Yeah. And that's the focus, the emphasis on Ed Welch's book and Mark Shaw's book as well.

[19:22] Any that are following the biblical presentation on addictions. In fact, they hesitate even using the term addiction, but we use it because it's a term that's understood.

But even that term addiction at times gives the concept in thinking that something's happened to me beyond myself and it's happened to me rather than me entering into it through voluntary choices.

And so, yes, that's what we always do want to remember is that this thing out here, the draw that I'm experiencing with this is that there's something that I believe that that provides for me that I can acquire and don't necessarily need God to acquire it.

I can get it apart from God. And so we want to understand the draw. And that's why I say earlier in the lesson, if we're walking through life without a realization that there are things that within the world system that Satan will use to act as draws upon us, then we're putting ourselves in a place of danger.

And we're living naively in a world that is no longer our own. We are sojourners and pilgrims in this world system. Ephesians 2 describes that for us, living in this world system and how we need to be careful.

[20:53] And we'll deal more with that next week and even the week after when we start looking at, well, how do we respond to all this that's going on? How do we respond biblically, even me as an individual, but then also how do I reach out?

Because I don't live in this world as an individual. And that's kind of the mindset we have to forsake as well, especially when we become Christians, a member of members of a church body.

And we can't move through life any longer with this, this mentality of individualism. We must move through life in this world as a, with this corporate mentality, this body life mentality, because we cannot live successfully fighting against enemies as individuals.

It was never designed by God for us to do that. And so the challenge for us, even as we deal with these lessons and move through the responses, we have to start thinking, well, when was the last time I really moved in the direction of a fellow member of the church and talked to them about how you doing in this warfare?

And many times we go through life as members of the body, just figuring they're okay. They don't struggle. But I was, every one of us here struggles with something.

[22 : 18] Every one of us. That's the reality of that. And we're here to really help each other fight this battle together. So good point. Anything else before we move on?

Carol? Carol? Yeah. You'll be able to remember this quote by the end of Alicia Patrick's book, Love to Eat and Eat. You were talking about all the issues for civil use of food.

She says, one of these things outside of us would be a draw for us. If it weren't something that were up to the rest of you, it was already in my own heart. Yeah. Yeah.

And they're draws to us. That's why it's different things are draws to different people, because my heart treasures quite possibly something different than your heart treasures.

And that's why you can stand back and think, man, how could he ever fall to that? I can stand back. How could he ever fall for that? Well, it's because we each treasure something different in our hearts, and there's different things in the world that could appeal to us if we're not careful to the point where we set aside the things of God that are true and right and good and pursue it in a different way.

[23 : 29] And that's what's happening on this journey with those who are heading down this journey of addiction. And when they get to this point of love and betrayal, it's become now a daily feature of life becomes the treatment for anything and everything.

They're beginning to learn and use it more to alleviate depression, the quiet, the emptiness of loss or failure, maybe to celebrate a happy occasion.

Anything that's a happy occasion, they'll use it. You know, this is, let's make it even happier. Maybe to dilute some guilt or feeling bad, and, of course, they've learned that this substance or this activity can be the thing that just takes care of these bad feelings.

And so this is what they're learning. Instead of taking legitimate problem-solving steps, the individual turns to the drug or temporary fix for relief or escape.

So we can see the person is relying on this substance or activity for things that only God can provide. He relies on the substance or activity to solve the problems even caused by the addiction.

[24 : 43] It's kind of like this. If the person fails to love their neighbor, to do something for their neighbor that they normally would have done, maybe didn't do it because they're intoxicated or something else, then they reengage their addiction or their substance to escape the stress that they have from thinking that the individual is now upset for them because they didn't do what they should have done.

And so there's the double reasoning there to go back to it. The substance activity has kept them from doing what was right in the first place.

Now they feel terrible about that, and now they take the substance to deal with the feelings they're having for not doing this back here. So that is the reasoning that's going on in an individual's life.

They're trying to escape a life that is void of or deprives them of what they desire. And it could be just these things of happiness and peace, recognition, security, excitement.

You'll hear as you listen to some of these testimonials, you'll hear all kinds of reasons that they give for moving in this direction in the first place and even why they continue it.

[25 : 56] And if we're not careful, we go down that same path. You can say, oh, why not? You know, I've been good today, so I'll just give myself this and partake this or I'll do this.

Man, I feel terrible. I'm going to go do this. We can find ourselves going down there and justifying it like it's no big deal. Well, that's the same thing that's going on here in the lives of people who are dealing with it in an unbiblical way.

So in response, they establish a relationship with a substance or activity they believe will enable them to achieve or experience the mood or desires that they long for.

And it's at this stage that they begin doing those things that they thought they would never end up doing. And as I've listened to some of these testimonials or read in books, this is where you begin seeing the individual stealing from those in the family.

You know, the family members begin seeing things that are missing, wondering what's going on. And, you know, hey, have you seen it? No, I have no idea where it is. Or taking things again that were special to them in the past.

[27 : 11] The one individual who was down this pathway further talked about he had a 1980 Datsun that was about 80% restored. And he was at the point of being thrown out of his apartment, needed money.

So this Datsun that he had that he was restoring, he figured, oh, yeah, if I sell that, I can get the money for the Datsun, pay my rent, and go on and on.

And life will be good. Sold the Datsun, money went to the drugs and the substance and lost his apartment, and down and down he goes. So those kind of things, stealing from themselves, taking money from things where the money should be going to.

We've already talked about the exaggerated excuses, the ongoing blame shifting. A quote from Brad Hambrick in his lesson, the fact that the action is unwise or wrong becomes less important than the fact that our conscience is callousing and our will is weakening.

We enter a new phase of danger when we no longer experience our increasingly addictive behavior as destructive and no longer have the desire to forsake it when we see the destruction.

[28 : 25] Like the one individual was talking about, he was walking down the street, he had cocaine in his hand, and his son was coming with his friends, and his son never acknowledged him, walked by him, and the man said, that's when it hurt the most.

He knew his son didn't want his friends to know that that was his dad. And he said, I knew my son was happy that I didn't say anything and let his friends know that I was his dad.

And so the price that they're paying there, the things that they're willing to give up, and even that, he says, wasn't at the point to turn me around. It just went on with my addiction.

The things that had become so important to him that he was willing to give up those things and was becoming more and more callous to that conscience that still is within the individual, saved or unsaved.

It's there. But what is the person doing with the conscience? And in this case, searing it more and more. And that is the greater danger, the thing that's happening.

[29 : 33] Any negative consequences the individual experiences from the substance or activity are quickly forgotten, ignored, and explained away. Perceived advantages override any negatives that are arising more and more frequently now in the person's life.

Actually, the addiction becomes a constant companion. That's that love relationship now. It's a friend and something to count on for predictable effect or outcome.

Some commentators on addiction describe it as a love relationship because of the intensity of the bond and the commitment to the behavior.

And, again, I keep going back to these testimonials that I was listening to and seeing the price that they were willing to pay and how one young lady got started so young at age, I think it was 10 or 12. And that's what impressed me as well with some of these testimonials, how young the individuals were when they got started on this pathway down to addictions.

[30 : 43] And this young lady, you know, got started young, 10, 12 years old, 14 years old. And by the time she was 16, she had left home and went to the big city as she described it and with a friend and experienced all the things there in the big city that a young girl would experience as she described it.

And coming to the point in her life where her friend was laying there beside her, taking her last breath, dying right there. I mean, at that point she didn't die.

She came back too. But that's what kind of broke her. She went back home. Her father accepted her back. And life was going good, got married, et cetera, et cetera.

One day just went back to it again. And not making sense to us, but this is the road to addiction that many are going down. Let me just give, in closing here, just some definition of some terms that we often use and that you read more and more in understanding what's going on.

And one term is that term of tolerance. And just read a quote here from Brad Hambrick. Our bodies were made by God to be remarkably adaptive, for better or worse.

[32 : 02] As you engage your addiction, your body creates a new normal to accommodate this new substance or practice. The result is that you have to increase the intensity of your addictive activity in order to experience the same effect.

And that's important to remember and understand as things go on. And as you even toy with the substance here, back here yourselves, and understanding that the more you use the substance, the more it's not going to satisfy.

Down the road, you're going to need more and more. Your body's building up a tolerance. You're going to need more and more of the substance to achieve what you achieved back here with less of the substance or activity.

Because your body physiologically is building up a tolerance for it. For instance, as you drink alcohol, your body adapts by producing more alcohol metabolizing enzymes.

The result is, A, your body becomes more efficient at processing the alcohol. So, B, it takes more alcohol to reach intoxication because of your body's newly developed efficiency.

[33 : 12] So, that's what's going on physiologically. There are some physical things going on which eventually will need to be dealt with. Even as we deal with things biblically, there's a physical element that we're going to have to deal with and help somebody deal with.

And so, that's why the draw becomes even stronger because of what is taking place within the person's body. The other term being that of withdrawal. Tolerance leads to withdrawal.

If tolerance means your body is adapting a new normal to accommodate your addictive substance, then withdrawal is your body's response to the absence of this new normal.

For this reason, withdrawal symptoms tend to be the opposite of the pleasurable effects of your, this means alcohol or drug of choice. For example, withdrawing from stimulants leaves you feeling lethargic or withdrawing from abusing pain medications results in you feeling achy in excess of whatever pain you may have been trying to medicate.

So, the withdrawal is going to happen because your body has built up a tolerance. So, whatever substance you've been using, you can figure out the opposite of what it's producing to make you feel so good.

[34 : 32] The opposite will take place in the withdrawal. And then one last term that would be helpful is that psychological dependence or craving, even for substances and activities that do not create tolerance and withdrawal, psychological dependence can still emerge and become enslaving through the experience of craving.

Addictions alter the reward center of the brain and thereby are motivational symptoms, which are more soul-mind than body. This is why we can experience controlling cravings even when the biological phenomenon of tolerance and withdrawal are not occurring.

This is also why addiction cannot just be reduced to biology or neurology. So, you might be used to going to something that isn't necessarily, we'll say, an addictive drug or substance of some kind.

But it's something you turn to to get what you want at that moment. And you do it, and this is another topic we'll study somewhere along the line, probably this manner of habit.

You do it so often, and it's such a pattern that you do develop a craving for that, even though it doesn't necessarily, wasn't in and of itself necessarily an addictive substance.

[35 : 59] So, you've trained yourself to such a degree that when this situation happens over here and you're not getting what you want or desire, what you've done in the past is to do this activity over here, and now you just turn to that with a craving and just go to that as your new savior.

So, the relationship the person was cultivating from friendship to infatuation to love has really turned on him or her. He or she has been betrayed by what he or she originally thought was a friend, providing what was good, and now turns into a harsh master, master, making demands, giving despair, sadness, and that's that last stage we'll take a look at next week and the tragedies that come at the end of the road.

Thoughts, comments, questions before we close? Karen? If addictions are a God substitute, then we should not be surprised when non-Christians are addicted.

And actually, I think we should expect that out of non-believers. Because everyone has to have that presence of God filled in some way, and that's what you're saying, it's a God substitute.

So, when you mentioned it's surprising that young lady who went back, well, if she never experienced a true conversion in looking to God to fulfill her, it isn't shocking that she went back to that lifestyle.

[37 : 40] That's right. And the basis, the foundation of that is that we are all worshipers. Just because a person that does not believe in God or Jesus Christ doesn't mean they're not a worshiper.

It just means that they're worshiping something else. Something else will take the attention that naturally is within our hearts, should be going to God.

But because, again, the depravity of man, the distortion that sin causes within the heart of a person, they're prone to go in that direction. Kevin? Even as Christians, maybe I'm on guard against those substitutes.

So, if you have your environment in your household with your wife or your children and it's upsetting, you begin to drink maybe one glass of wine a day to calm your nerves or to help you, and that can slowly, as you're wanting to post up there, so you're going to need more.

So then maybe the next month you're going to need two glasses to get that same calming effect, and then maybe three. And so what started out as maybe innocent progresses to a point of addiction.

[38 : 55] Now, pain pills, I know Christians who have become addicted to those, that's something that they stumble into. But we need to be on guard against that.

Yeah. If you're having financial difficulties in your home, you may see these scratch-offs, and you just buy one, you know, you think of it as maybe an innocent thing, and before long, then you're buying two, and three, and four a day.

So anything can yet be on guard against those, even with a Christian. Even a spirit-filled believer can stumble down that path.

Yeah, and so that's, again, what we're going to be cautious of and careful of, and we'll be taking a look at some of these steps that we do take to avoid not going down there as Christians, and then also to help others who are going down that path to make that turnaround, which is called repentance and walking in obedience to God.

All right. Well, this is what I usually think. There's lots of thoughts and comments out there that we'd love to be able to make time for, but we don't have time, so let's close in prayer. Father, this morning, we do give thanks for your great work of salvation.

[40 : 18] Father, that you've set in place and in motion, in motion, before even the foundation of the world, by grace, we are saved.

We recognize, Father, that the pathway that we would be going down apart from Jesus Christ, your grace and mercy that is so real in the lives of other people, and yet we even still recognize the tendency that exists within us, Father, the deceitful desires, the workings of the flesh that if we're not careful, we could go down there, but, Father, in great contrast to that, we thank you again for the good news that we have in Jesus Christ, that we can walk as new creations in Christ Jesus, walk in newness of life and be slaves to righteousness in Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you very much.