

# Addiction & Recovery Counseling BC-202

This course introduces the student to the world of addiction. By the end of the course, you will gain a foundational understanding of addiction, the different forms of addiction, the types of treatment available, and the recovery process. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the application of biblical principles, the student will know how to plan and deliver the best care possible to those struggling with unhealthy habits in their church or community. *This course is not for licensed therapists, psychiatrists, Christian counselors, or any other credentialed provider. It is a foundational course for lay counselors and those interested in offering basic help and support to those struggling with unhealthy behaviors in their local communities and faith assemblies.*

## Introduction

As pastors, biblical counselors, para-church ministry leaders, and marketplace ministers, it is essential to know about addiction and addictive behaviors to understand how to confront them with the proper tools and approach. These roles in ministry are mentioned because they are typically the ones that will serve in what is called the “Helping Ministry.” The mental health therapist/practitioner, chaplains, and lay counselors are included in this group.

Drug and Alcohol addiction and other addictive behaviors have become an extremely concerning problem today. Substance abuse is a social problem that affects not just the individuals who misuse these substances but also their family and friends (support system).

Addiction does not discriminate, and it cuts across all ethnic, cultural, socio-economic statuses, ages, and gender. It destroys homes, marriages, careers, and relationships and threatens the overall health and safety of those involved in addictive behaviors.

### *Statistics in the U.S. and Other Parts of The World*

Statistics show that alcohol and drug addiction cost the U.S. economy over \$600 billion every year. According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, there have been approximately 700,000 drug overdose deaths in the U.S. since 2000.

- Most recent reports show that 31.9 million Americans alone are currently using illegal drugs/substances.
- According to the Institute for Security Studies, the number of drug users in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to increase by nearly 150% by 2050. The studies conducted predict that the continent of Africa will experience the most significant growth in absolute numbers of drug users of any region globally.
- Recent studies done show a significant percentage of individuals in most countries around the globe, especially the western world, are addicted to internet pornography, according to the Journal of Clinical Medicine.
- There are forty to eighty million Americans who suffer from compulsive overeating.
- Gambling is a billion-dollar industry in the U.S. alone.

Addiction is an epidemic in our global society. It is a social problem that people regardless of where they live or what they have, has experienced, or knows of someone who has. People must be aware of and concerned about addiction because it is a destructive force, an enemy that has destroyed many lives via various forms of addictive behaviors and substances.

## What is Addiction?

We have mentioned in the previous section the tremendous damage that addiction is causing around the world in the lives of people. The numbers have proven it. So now let us discuss what addiction is.

In simple terms, addiction is the overwhelming desire to do something continuously that proves difficult to stop or control. If a person continues in a particular behavior that they can no longer control, that thing becomes an addiction. In Christian context, the individual has become a slave to that thing. "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" Romans 7:15 ESV. Uncontrolled eating (food addiction), compulsive gambling, uncontrolled use of prescription drugs such as oxycodone are all examples of addictive behaviors.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), the medical profession's definition of addiction is that addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. ASAM states that people with addiction use substances or engage in compulsive behaviors and often continue despite harmful consequences.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), people often start misusing drugs for various reasons, which includes the following:

1. To feel good – The feeling of "high," a pleasurable feeling
2. To feel better – Relieves stress, makes themselves numb, forgetting all their troubles.
3. To do better – Some drugs enhance performance, e.g., steroids. It helps a person to do better in an exam (test) or athletic event.
4. Peer pressure or simply curious – This is for pure experimentation. They are doing it because they have either been forced to do so or want to do what others are doing.

Addiction symptoms include bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils, runny nose, bad breath, or body odor. Also, the inability to focus, forgetfulness, sores on the skin, needle marks, agitation, little or no appetite, tooth decay, and loss. Others include a change in skin color, lying, stealing, promiscuity, lack of sleep, no interest in school or work, the list goes on....

## Types of Addiction and Its Categories

Below are the various types of addiction and they are group by categories

- Substance Use Addictions
  - Alcohol
  - Caffeine – a stimulant most commonly consumed and found in soft drinks, coffee, tea, energy drinks. Too much caffeine interferes with sleep, causes headaches, and can increase one's blood pressure (hypertension).
  - Depressants – This is used to describe various types of drugs that increase brain function. It can cause lots of damage including coma, ataxia ( loss of muscle coordination), low blood pressure ( hypotension) and even death depending on the length of use and how much is used. Examples of depressants include Benzodiazepines, Thorazine, and the most common, Alcohol which affects the central nervous system.
  - Prescription Drugs e.g., Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, Fentanyl
  - Narcotics – Opium, Heroin, Codeine, Methadone. These are referred to as psychoactive compounds with paralyzing or sleep inducing properties.
  - Inhalants – are toxic ( chemical vapors) substances that are breathed in orally. Examples of such which a lot of times are legal and use for day to day tasks include spray paint, computer cleaner, paint remover, gasoline, nail polish remover, fuel gas and more.
  - Stimulants - Cocaine, Methamphetamines (Meth), are illegal substances that increase energy and raises levels of physiological activity in the body.
  
- Behavioral Addictions
  - Cutting & Self harm
  - Body building & Body image – This involves obsessing over one's looks, appearance, in a way that affects one's health and relationships. It can lead to eating disorders such as binge eating, anorexia and bulimia mentioned on this list.
  - Gambling
  - Pornography
  - Eating disorders – Anorexia and Bulimia
  - Food Addictions ( Gluttony)

- Kleptomania
- Social Media, Internet Addiction
- Other Addictions
  - Workaholism
  - Uncontrollable Anger
  - Toxic Relationships
  - Attention Seeking
  - Obsessions
  - Religious Addiction
  - Interest in the occult, satanic activities

Addictions are typically grouped into four categories:

1. Addictions that stimulate – These are activities or substances that provide arousal and ecstasy which often results in a release of adrenaline.
2. Addictions that tranquilize – These are activities or substances that comforts or reduce anxiety or tension typically resulting in a release of endorphins.
3. Addictions that help satisfy mental or psychological needs like workaholism.
4. Addictions that satisfy unusual appetites – These includes urges for pornographic literatures, paraphernalia, videos, and fetishes.

It is essential to note that people do not get addicted or become heavily reliant on substances or portray addictive behavior instantaneously. Instead, it progresses over time, and experts have stated that it occurs in different phases.

It begins with experimenting, then occasional usage, followed by regular use and eventually complete dependence, which is the destructive phase where they now need it to survive. In this final phase (total dependence), the individual pretty much loses everything- family, career, business, assets, if any, and more.

So, what causes people to be addicted to certain substances and behaviors? Over the years, to find the answer to this question, several beliefs and reasons have been suggested. For example, addiction is viewed by some as an incurable disease; some explain it away as a genetic situation.

This means addiction runs in the family line, i.e., If a person has or had a family member who struggles with alcohol, there is a high chance that someone in that family may be predisposed to it as well. Another suggestion to explain the cause of addiction is that it is sociocultural meaning. The person is influenced by the society they live in, peer pressure, easy access to illegal drugs. There is also the personality viewpoint or model where some believe that addiction is caused by poor impulse control, poor coping skills, and low self-esteem.

One final reason or belief that needs to be mentioned is “the choice model,” meaning the individual made a personal and willful decision to use illegal and

harmful substances or participate in destructive behaviors. Therefore, they are entirely responsible for their own actions.

Regardless of whatever model or viewpoint one supports, the crucial thing to understand is the reality of addiction. As counselors and pastors, we need to address this “monster” in our communities, congregations, workplaces. We can only succeed at confronting and dealing with this issue with the help of the Spirit of God, who is willing and able to set people free. “So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:38.

## **What Does Scripture Say About Addiction?**

According to experts, alcohol and drug addiction are diseases; obesity and overeating are genetic predispositions. Obsessive relationship attachments are labeled “codependent,” Excessive spending may be a symptom of bipolar disorder. However, addiction is sometimes labeled or referred to as a spiritual stronghold from a Christian or biblical perspective. A Christian who struggles with pornography or sexual addiction, for example, is said to be oppressed or troubled by an unclean spirit or the spirit of immorality/lust.

A spiritual stronghold, by definition, means being spiritually powered or controlled by force or something stronger than you. This is where the help of the Holy Spirit and the power of God comes in to deliver us from such grip or control.

When a person lives a life of disobedience (an ungodly lifestyle), the person opens the door to the enemy, satan. His primary job is to steal, kill and destroy the lives of people, especially God’s children. John 10:10.

A sinful lifestyle results in the spirit man (inner man). The body is polluted and adversely affected by the enemy. Addictive behaviors are examples of living a sinful lifestyle, practicing ungodly acts. From a biblical perspective, confessing one’s sins, repentance and deliverance are crucial in the life of the Christian. It results in being liberated (set free) from spiritual captivity and eventually reconciled back to God.

Is there anywhere listed in scripture where addiction is mentioned? You will not see the word “addiction” in the Bible. Still, you will see a few examples of addictive behaviors that Scripture mentions.

Let us look at a few examples.

1. Drunkenness (Alcoholism) – Excessive alcohol intake inhibits or dulls the mind making it easier for a person to fall into destructive behavior. “Envy, murders,

drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:21. KJV. In this verse, the Bible clearly states that anyone who engages in the act of drunkenness shall not inherit the kingdom of God because the act is sinful.

2. Pornography and Sexual Addictions - “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Galatians 5:19.

Pornography has become more rampant in recent years because of technology. Even within the Christian faith, both men and women have become chronically addicted to porn, and technology has made it more accessible than ever (i.e., smartphone, tablet device).

3. Gluttony (Food Addiction) - Overeating and obsessively thinking about food is a type of addiction. Studies show that most people who struggle with this addiction often struggle with issues in their lives. But unfortunately, food is just a way of masking the problem.

Underlying issues that may be triggers for this constant food craving include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, fear, past trauma. Scriptures tell us that gluttony or overeating is a sin, but He can provide a way of escape, a way out. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

4. Kleptomania (Uncontrollable Stealing) - This refers to an ongoing need and psychological urge to steal items of little or no value to the individual. These are typically things that the individual can ordinarily afford but unable to control themselves. This type of behavior is referred to by psychologists and therapists as an impulsive control disorder. The person often may require professional help to determine whether any trauma caused the habit or addiction to the brain. Studies show that this disorder is more common for some reason with women than men. One must understand that kleptomania, although it involves theft, is never planned or done intentionally; it just happens on the spur of the moment while stealing or robbery is preplanned. From a biblical perspective, we are told that stealing of any magnitude is sinful and should not occur in the lives of Christians.

Ephesians 4:28, Leviticus 19:11, Romans 13:9.

God is more than able to help the individual overcome the temptation to steal. He will always provide a way of escape. 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

## **Addiction Treatment**

### **From a Secular/Clinical View**

In medicine, there is no one treatment or remedy for addiction because there are various types. Therefore, it is crucial to administer the proper treatment to the diagnosis specified by the medical or mental health practitioner. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), most people addicted to substance abuse require long-term or repeated care to stop using completely and recover their lives. Counseling and various forms of behavioral therapies are needed and are the most used forms of treatment. Medications are often an essential part of treating different types of addictions, especially when combined with behavioral therapies. For substance abuse use, medically monitored detoxification (physiological removal of toxic substances from the human body) is the first stage of treatment. Medications and devices can help suppress withdrawal symptoms during detoxification. According to NIDA, there are three medications (FDA approved) used to treat alcohol addiction.

Behavioral therapy, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, helps individuals recognize, avoid, and cope with the situations in which they are most likely to use drugs. According to American Addiction Centers, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a valuable treatment tool because it can be used for many different types of addiction including, but not limited to, food addiction, alcohol addiction, and prescription drug addiction.

### **From a Biblical/Christian View**

Christians are not exempt from experiencing life challenges related to substance use and other types of addiction. During my time at the detox and rehabilitation facility, working with patients struggling with alcohol and drug dependence, I met quite a few who were believers. These individuals were not only facing the issues of addiction but also intense shame and disappointment in themselves. These feelings can hinder a Christian's ability to ask for help. And so, the emergence of faith-based treatment programs around the United States and other parts of the world has made it easier to seek help. It is a place where fellowship, support, and care can be found among people who share their beliefs. In faith-based treatment programs, medical detoxification "detox" is very crucial. It removes the substances (drugs and alcohol) from the individual's system. A thorough physical examination is done to ensure that these substances have been eliminated from the person's system. Once detox is completed, other things such as prayer and one-on-one therapy, group therapy sessions, bible study, counseling with chaplains, pastors, and 12 steps Christ-centered recovery programs are incorporated.

## Recovery & Relapse Prevention – Counseling from a Biblical Perspective

With secular approaches, medication therapy is frequently required for relapse prevention. Medical providers administer individuals' medications to help re-establish normal brain function and decrease cravings. In addition, drugs are available for the treatment of heroin and alcohol addiction.

So, knowing what you know now about the field of addiction, how can you effectively counsel the Christian who is struggling with one or more of these issues?

As biblical counselors, we must help the counselee recognize the role sin plays in the addiction and guide them on the right path to recovery using the Word of God and other biblically focused tools like prayer, accountability partner/sponsorship, 12 step groups, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. As Christians, the battle of the mind and the flesh exists daily. It is a daily struggle, but the choice to resist the temptation to succumb to the flesh has been given to every believer. For treatment and recovery to be effective, the individual must recognize that he or she has a problem and take responsibility for it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, an individual can resist cravings and lusts of the flesh. Scripture states: "Now the practices of the sinful nature are evident: they are sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality (total irresponsibility, lack of self-control), Amp. If the cravings and actions of our flesh are evident, then through them, our heart is revealed. The heart conveys our affection, devotion to time and energy, our longing, and commitment.

One crucial thing to recognize and understand is that some situations may need medical treatment because some addictions are biological than mental or emotional.

There might be underlying chronic issues like thyroid problems, heart problems, and other physical problems that may be going on. If you observe that or the counselee mentions it to you in a session, it is essential to have them immediately seek medical treatment or advice/counsel.



## **In Summary:**

With the help of the biblical counselor, pastor or lay counselor, a plan is implemented to assist the counselee in making the necessary steps towards change. New habits which also comprises the above mentioned biblically focus tools needs to be regularly practiced helping overcome the struggle with old behaviors and habits.

Biblical counseling is a powerful and remarkably effective ministry that has been able to support and help those who are hurting. Many in the Christian community are struggling with various forms of addictive behaviors and addictions; they are in spiritual bondages and through the power of the Holy Spirt and God's Word, counselors have been able to minister to the brokenhearted; guiding them to healing and wholeness.

## References:

*Clinton T., & Scalise E. (2013). Addiction And Recovery Counseling. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI.*

*National Institute on Drug Abuse. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics>*