

Responding to Addictions – A Christian Perspective

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This morning we want to share about the opioid epidemic in our county and how we as God's people can make a difference. We carry the same anointing as Jesus to see the captives set free.

Luke 4:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”^[1]

We have a growing crisis in our county that should concern all of us. We are the light of the world – the salt of the earth. We can't ignore it. If the church doesn't get involved I see little hope.

Local deaths

In Lancaster County, 165 people died from drug overdoses last year — most of them using prescription painkillers, heroin or fentanyl, according to the county coroner.

That's more than 40 percent higher than the 117 people who died from overdose in 2016, and nearly double the 84 overdose deaths reported in 2015. This is much worse than the national increase of 21 percent.

Many more OD and were saved through the drug Narcan. *Lancaster County's* 911 system has logged about 5,000 drug overdoses since the beginning of 2014.

A growing caseload is putting enormous pressure on child protective services in Lancaster County and across the state. The cases often involve children whose parents are opioid abusers. In 2016, parental substance abuse was the leading factor in the state's 31,649 confirmed cases of child abuse. Drug use by parents also is the leading reason Pennsylvania children are removed from their homes.

President Donald Trump has declared the opioid crisis a national emergency,

This month Governor Wolf Declared Heroin and the Opioid Epidemic a Statewide Disaster Emergency

Lancaster County District Attorney Craig Stedman, “We do not expect this death rate to decrease anytime soon,” Stedman said, adding that the opioid epidemic is “unlike any I have seen in my 26 years as a prosecutor (in Lancaster County).”

There’s not a “one-solution-fits-all” solution for people addicted to opioids, Stedman said; however, they often benefit from long-term treatment and a healthy support system. – and holding dealers accountable.

There are various opinions of the best way to approach this. Some come at it from a law enforcement perspective, some from a medical perspective, and some from the treatment side. I would suggest it is all of the above. I think for the treatment side to be truly effective we need the Jesus factor included.

Today we have three people with us who are involved in the area of addictions and recovery. Listen to them with an open mind. Increase your knowledge so you can respond in a more helpful way.

We like the simple answers such as repent and stop doing drugs. But it isn’t that simple as we will hear. God hasn’t called us to judge the addict but to help them. How can we do that as the Christian community?

Our very own -- Dr. Joe Troncale, MD is Corporate Medical Director of Retreat Premier Addiction Treatment Centers. He was born in Birmingham, Alabama and attended the University of Alabama and subsequently the University of South Alabama College of Medicine in Mobile, Alabama. He did an Internal Medicine internship and a Family Medicine residency there. In the 1990s he began work in addictions with Lancaster General Hospital as Medical Director of Susquehanna Addiction Center. From 2001 through 2010 he was Medical Director at Caron Foundation. For the past 6 years he has been associated with Retreat. He is a Distinguished Fellow of the American Society of Addiction Medicine. He is a veteran of the United States Army and is a diplomate of both the American Board of Addiction Medicine and the American Board of Family Medicine.

Eugene Carmack -Short Bio: Eugene grew up in the mountains of North Carolina in a good Christian family. While in college, he discovered drugs and alcohol solved all of the problems he had felt internally his whole life. He went from college, to combat with USMC, to cartels, to a used-up heroin and meth junkie that would use whatever made the pain go away. He says: "I didn't want to be that way. After a decade long battle, I have been sober and clean from hard drugs for over three years through the power of Christ, and the people that he put in my life to walk me through it. I have served as House Manager at the Potter's House (you guys know it as TTC I believe) for over two years and have been working closely in the plain community with their problems. God truly turned my world upside down.... Made his power perfect in my weakness."

Pastor Ken Reinford – In addition to his executive pastor role here at Petra, Ken has taken many guys into his home to help them with their life controlling problems. He has helped many get into treatment and God has now open doors for him to relate to the Amish community. They too have been hit hard with addictions such as porn and drugs. Ken is part of the team that has started Celebrate Recovery in ELANCO.

Thank you all for being willing to share your expertise and insights into the area of addictions. We are going to primarily focus on drug addiction this morning.

We will begin with Dr. Joe. Share your insights on addiction....

Dr. Joe Troncale Outline for teaching on addictions:

I have been working exclusively with people with addiction and mental health disorders for about the last 20+ years. Addiction runs in our family and in the family of the children we adopted.

What is addiction?

Simply, it is a brain disorder. It spills over into people's behavior. It develops in individuals with a certain genetic make-up, a dysfunctional environment and the exposure to the addictive substance or behavior leading to compulsive use of the substance or behavior.

1. People are spirit, soul and body
2. In addictive disorders there are problems with all three
 - a. Spiritually, people become separated from God and others
 - b. Psychologically, people believe themselves to be "less than."
 - c. Physically, there is a brain disorder that is real and well documented.

3. My charge this morning is to briefly discuss the physical part since I represent the “medical side” of this morning’s discussion. I will confine my remarks to alcohol and drugs. There are many other addictive behaviors which function the same way.
4. Many people begin the road to addiction by using alcohol or drugs as we say, “recreationally” to alter mood, as a social behavior. Other people are given medications that have addictive potential by doctors or relatives for legitimate pain relief or to relieve symptoms such as anxiety or mental health issues. Substance use or abuse is NOT the same as addiction. Addiction is manifest by compulsive use despite harm to themselves.
5. Regardless of why someone is using potentially addictive substances, whenever addictive substances are used by anyone, there are parts of the brain that gets stimulated by these substances and certain chemical changes happen. A substance called dopamine is released and while many things happen in the brain with substance use, the critical area of the brain we need to discuss with addiction is the pleasure center of the brain. The medical term is the nucleus accumbens. When addictive substances are used, dopamine is released near the pleasure center and the pleasure and euphoria associated with drug or alcohol use occurs. To put a one-hour lecture into 5 minutes here, it is critical for purposes of this teaching that everyone understand that certain individuals who use drugs or alcohol for whatever reasons have the genetic predisposition for this pleasure center to dysregulate after a variable period of time depending on the individual. The regulation of the pleasure center “breaks” and the individual loses control over stopping substance use once it starts. This is the medical definition of addiction. This is where there is a lot of misunderstanding about addiction and people with addiction. Once this happens in someone’s brain, it is a permanent situation which can ONLY be treated by abstaining from addictive substances. There are nuances to this which are beyond the scope of today’s teaching. What I need everyone here to understand today is that about 10% of the population has the genetic set-up to develop addiction. Once it occurs, the individual is left with a chronic, life-long problem that has to be managed. Active addiction result in behavioral and mental changes that, on the surface, can be viewed as immoral. Addicted individual’s behavior stem from compulsions in which they lack control of when they are in active addiction mode.
6. What I and the people who work in my field do is to help people MANAGE. Addiction is like insulin-dependent diabetes in that diabetics who require insulin are not CURED of their diabetes, rather their diabetes is MANAGED with diet, insulin and exercise. Similarly, the MANAGEMENT of addiction is three-fold if we go back to the spirit, soul, body paradigm:
7. Spiritually, people with addiction have to be CONNECTED to God and to other healthy, sober people.

8. From the “soulful” or psychological standpoint, people with addiction generally have at the root of their problems, trauma or unmet expectations that cause unacceptable feelings which lead to using drugs or alcohol as an escape mechanism. The treatment for this is teaching self-compassion and self-validation so that uncomfortable emotions can be accepted rather than escaped from.
9. Medically, substances of addiction have to be scrupulously avoided. But the avoidance of addictive substances will only happen if the person learns to tolerate their feelings. This usually requires therapy depending on the severity of their trauma or unmet expectations plus involvement in programs such as AA or Celebrate Recovery.
10. Families with addicted individuals need help as well because helping people with addiction is very counter-intuitive. Family members who are well-meaning can be co-dependent and enable family members or children with addiction by making excuses for them, bailing them out of situations or otherwise not holding them accountable for their behavior.

Eugene Carmack Notes:

- **What Can I Do:**

- To begin with we can unite in prayer.
- We can prayerfully consider giving to places that work to help those caught in addiction after rehab.
- Most importantly you can make real connections. The opposite of addictions, I believe, along with many others, is connection. This means sacrificing time, being vulnerable, being willing to get messy and hurt. This is where you begin to see lives transformed. I will elaborate some on my own experience. The personal connection will bring the addict to Christ and into positive support networks many times before a Bible tract or Evangelical message.

- **Ideas on How to Protect Children and Youth**

- This is a hard one. I grew up in a good Christian home, I have seen Addiction tear across the plain community and places you would think it not. Part of this is because addiction is much more complex than just one of the Theories or Modalities of Addiction

- Gabor Mate says, “Prevention Begins at the First Prenatal Visit.” That the primary root of addiction is a lack of relational, social, mental, and emotional attunement with the world around them, usually attributed to some unknown or known trauma. We must teach our youth from the time they comprehend your words, that emotions (good and bad) are okay and healthy. Teach them how to talk about them. Emotional development and the ability to process emotion is key in prevention (we could have a whole seminar on that).
- It is important to inform them about drugs, not from the vantage point of fear, but in open conversation, in such a way that they can share their thoughts and feelings, and what goes on in their social life. We have tons of literature about this stuff. Coalition for a Drug Free Community meets monthly at Garden Spot for the topic of prevention. Compass Mark is a wonderful resource. I have found it good to be open, let a teenager hear the stories of a woman or man that came through addiction
- I believe Ken is doing Comfort and Hope, but I can chime in on that on que. I see lives and families changing daily. I am a life that was changed as well.

Pastor Ken Reinford’s Notes:

You are hearing a LOT of information this morning and you are probably having one of 3 responses:

1. What are they talking about? I don’t struggle; no one in my family struggles. So, turn it off.
2. Help! They are talking about me. I’m fighting to stay alive one day at a time. I’m the addicted.
3. I know exactly what they are talking about. I’m stuck supporting and dealing with a loved one who struggles.

This morning I’d like to offer each of you HOPE, support, and a compassionate heart; some practical application. This is an abbreviated response this morning to a very complicated social, family, and personal issue this morning.

This morning we have narrowed our focus to drugs and alcohol but let me expand it to all addictions for my comments. Maybe you find yourself dealing with compulsive behavior with

Prescription drugs (also big in LC), illegal drugs, alcohol, food overeating, sexual bondage (this is a silent secret in the church and culture), anger, anxiety/fear and many other options of addictions.

I'd like to extend an invitation to everyone here or online to join the 3 of us for an ongoing dialogue about this issue on Monday night, February 5, 7 pm in the Petra Café. We will offer more info and be available to dialogue with you.

For a scripture base to the rest of my response this morning I was drawn to I John 3:16-24.

1 John 3:16-24The Message (MSG) (on screen)

1. To those of you who wonder what we are talking about and have not contact with anyone who struggles, I'd like to challenge you to get involved. Learn as much as you can about this crisis. Maybe it's fear that keeps you unengaged. Maybe it's fear. What we all of us need to do is to ask God if we are free from judgment. According to Matthew 7:1 we're not to judge others but as our scriptures tell us to LOVE. I hear some say, just tell them to get over it, stop the habit. As you now know, it's a brain issue. Yes, also a sin issue but it's very complicated. Recovery is a long journey. Pray for a compassionate heart and ask God to help you engage.
2. To those of you who struggle daily with this addiction demon on your back. I want to encourage you to press, to fight, to declare your identity in Jesus Christ who speaks abundant life to you. He speaks hope and transformation to your whole being, your brain, your mind, and body. Jesus is your potential for healing and redemption, for FREEDOM. Battle the shame war going on in your head, break the secrets. I want to stress that Petra is a safe place, a place of healing. We have pastors, counselors, mentors, and coaches that have compassion and invite you to join the recovery journey, receiving all that Jesus has for you.
 - a. Celebrate Recovery – joint collaborative efforts of several churches in ELANCO area. We meet every Thursday night here at Petra from 6-9 p.m., you find safety here for healing in whatever you struggle. We have gender specific support groups. Find more information on either table in the lobby or our website.

RECOVERY - 2 principles/steps (on screen)

- i. Realize that I'm NOT God. Admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.
 1. Matt 5:3 "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor"

- ii. Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.
 - 1. Matt 5:4 “Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”
 - b. Sexual Bondage – Men or Women
 - i. Here at Petra we have PURE DESIRE for Men and women – many are finding freedom, healing and growth –
 - ii. Men – February 6, 7 pm – new updated Conquer Series for you, if you struggle and wish to be informed to help those who do, come join us
 - iii. Upcoming April 20 & 21 – Pure Desire University – training for all who want to learn more about how to help others with Sexual bondage. This is a regional training event that we here at Petra are sponsoring to train and engage other churches.
3. Maybe you are in the group who deals with others who struggle day in and day out. You are weary, angry, tired, and feel abandoned. To you I want to offer HOPE. Luke 4, Jesus is our savior and redeemer too. It’s He who breaks the chains, not you! Believe me, I fully understand. I could entertain you with real live testimonies of this battle as I’ve fully engaged in this struggle with other guys over the past 14 years. I’ve been deceived, lied to, hated, cursed at, house destroyed, stolen from... I know the feelings, anger/frustration and the feelings of betrayal and rejection and exasperation. IT IS HARD, but according to I John 3 I have no other options but to LOVE. But for me to love as Jesus loves I need healthy self-care and accountability from others. You have a voice.....
- a. Do you have a support group to help you deal with your addicted loved one?
 - i. New parent support group, RECLAIMING HOPE, lead by Doug & Sara Colby. Wednesday nights at 7:15. Collaboration of parents here in ELANCO area but all parents are welcome. They are studying, supporting, and praying together. They do have a voice in this battle.
 - b. New Women’s Prayer set who gather to pray for the struggling and prodigals.
 - c. Start a support group. A Petra couple has started a parents’ support group in the Amish Community, walls are being broken down.
 - d. Maybe God is inviting you to open your home for a struggling and broken person in recovery. The challenges are offset by the rewards.
 - e. We must learn the difference between Loving and Enabling. That’s why we need each other for checks and balances. Our hearts must be pure and not allowed to be developed into codependency.
 - f. Realize we are in a spiritual war. The enemy is exposing himself and need to declare him as the enemy not our loved ones.

- g. We need more spiritual Fathers and Mothers to fill the void in many people today. Our broken families leave many wounded victims.
- h. We need more employers willing to give jobs and take risks. Not enable by ignoring regular drug tests and time off for recovery and healing.
- i. We need the compassion of Jesus.

Yes, the days are evil. People are dying of overdoses; marriages are disintegrating. These are difficult days. Jesus warned us they were coming. LOOK UP the harvest is ripe, the world is looking for answers, looking for relationships, and connection. Church we have the answer! What are we going to do? Are we grace-givers and not judges? Is your heart open to the down trodden and broken?

We have the GOOD NEWS for those caught in addictions. What is your response to Jesus' invitation to LOVE and to put action to your faith?