Lutheran Family Service

For Nothing is Impossible with God

Confronting Your Addiction



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Confronting Your Addiction

Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Ever wonder how much is too much? Great question for all of us to ask ourselves as we examine our coping strategies for our lives. Learning how to cope and adapt to life's stressors is a good thing, but sometimes our choices for coping can become problematic.

The 2017 LCMS Churchworker Wellness Survey, which included commissioned and non-commissioned church workers and their spouses, showed that 32% of church workers struggle with compulsive behavior (alcohol, food, pornography, etc.) *This item is noted to be underreported in survey research so the reality is likely higher*.

While abuse of alcohol and prescription and street drugs may come to mind as the culprits when referring to compulsive behavior, there are other activities that can become a focus of abuse as well. Gambling, working, overeating, anorexia, bulimia, video games, internet surfing, self-harm (cutting or other pain-seeking), over exercising, viewing pornography and excessive shopping are areas that can become, or are from the start, self-defeating.

To identify for yourself if an activity is self-defeating, it is important to engage in an honest inventory of the results of that behavior. Questions to ask yourself include:

- **How much time do I spend in this activity?** Do I lose track of time when engaged in it? For example, if I sit down to play a video game for 30 minutes, do I end up spending three hours? What is displaced when I go over the time limit, I set? Less time with family? Less work accomplished?
- **How often am I preoccupied by thinking about the next time I might engage in the activity?** Am I thinking throughout the day about getting home to drink a beer or two to the point that I am distracted? Do I frequently plan my route to work to be able to hit a fast-food drive through even though it takes me out of my way?
- **What are the consequences of the activity?** Am I jeopardizing finances of the family with my overspending while shopping or gambling? Are there arguments between my spouse and me regarding my drinking or online usage? Does my preoccupation affect my work, family, self-esteem? Am I engaging in something illegal, physically harmful, or vocationally unacceptable? Do I feel guilty while I am doing it or thinking about it?

The thought of having an addiction can be frightening. So frightening, that taking a hard look at what is happening may be avoided. It may be helpful to assess the situation with one simple observation:

If it causes a problem, it is one.

The good news is that there are solutions to the problem of addictions. The solution may be in the form of formal outpatient counseling, inpatient treatment, and/or attendance at support groups or 12-step programs with which we learn how to live our lives without the behavior that is creating difficulties.

Addictions may be looked at as a behavior that is being used to fill a need in an individual's life that is not being met. The need may be to relax, relieve stress, manage anger, improve sense of self, avoid, or diminish emotional pain, seek sexual gratification and many others. Finding the need is critical to addressing the addiction, as is finding a healthier manner in which to get that need met.

For example, if playing video games is a way in which you relieve stress from the workday or relationship issues, looking at what might help directly address the need can be helpful. This may include physical exercise, focused relaxation training, conversation about the issue with a spouse or friend, or seeing a professional counselor. It may be helpful to set limits on time spent playing games, but if unable to stick to the time limit, forgoing playing video games completely may be necessary. An accountability partner is helpful to report to regarding progress and snags you may come up against in your recovery plan.

Calling upon God to deliver us from addictions and other problematic behaviors is a critical step in recovery. Seek God's help through prayer, scripture, and study. If your efforts to reduce or eliminate your own addictive behaviors aren't successful, seek out addiction specialists in your area, pastors, or Employee Assistance programs. There is hope. There is help.

James 1:12-15

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

1 Peter 5:10

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

Romans 5:3-5

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

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