The history of the field of addiction recovery has been filled with prejudice and suspicion. In the early days of recovery, alcoholics did not have much use for drug addicts. Both groups feared those addicts who had a diagnosis of mental illness. The 12 step devotees were suspicious of professionals who were not recovering addicts. Likewise, science was viewed as too abstract and out-of-touch with the realities of addicts who were daily struggling to stay clean and sober. Many in Christian churches believed that the twelve-step process was not in harmony with scriptural teaching, and that one-step: faith in God, was enough.

Whenever there are new developments in any field, there are natural, human resistances to change. While some of these tensions unfortunately still exist, thank God that great strides have been made to come to terms with different and varied needs in understanding in the past few decades. Today, it is hard to find a pure alcoholic or drug addict. Most addicts use multiple substances. When this was understood, the term “chemical dependency” came into vogue. We now look at addiction even more broadly by including habits, behaviors and compulsions other than substances. We call many of these process addictions. Mental health conditions are seen as “co-occurring disorders.” The twelve steps have been thoroughly integrated with Scripture and even with the writings of Ellen G. White. Great strides have been made to use scientific findings to both understand and treat addiction. Addiction has been recognized as a specialty area within the professions of medicine, nursing and social work. This issue of Journey to Life is a prime example of how the professions can contribute immensely to helping those struggling with addiction. Dr. Ricardo Whyte, a physician specializing in the treatment of addiction, has written a marvelous article on a Christian perspective on process addictions. He helps us to understand how people God’s word can be effectively used to treat process addictions.

It is our fondest hope that you will be blessed by this article as well as the other contributions on the steps, testimonials and recent events. My prayer is that we will learn to truly listen to one another, understand varying points of view, and stay open to new and differing developments in the field of addiction. The truth is that we need each other. Please remember to send me your upcoming events, reports on recent events testimonials and ideas. This is “our” newsletter. We need to be enriched by the reports of growth and recovery from all members of the body (1 Corinthians 12). Please forward your contributions to the newsletter to me at sedlacek@andrews.edu!

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Often we are like a sleepy driver who is powerless over an impending accident. A power greater than our drowsy, unaware brain, snaps us to attention as we drive off the road and hear the gravel from the roadside begin hitting the underside of our car. For this returning alertness, through a power greater than ourselves and beyond our control, we are most grateful.

In a similar way, we are very thankful for the process by which a Power greater than ourselves, is able to get our attention that something is wrong with our character and harmful habits. This God-given Power helps us get back on the road to life as we journey to wholeness, which is found in looking to Jesus Christ and the way He lived His life.

Recently, the subject of prayer was being discussed in a class. The teacher repeatedly emphasized what He considered to be a primary reason for Jesus’ prayer life. Jesus knew the necessity of staying connected to His Power source. Because of this, He was able to live a life free from sin. Staying connected I believe is vital and is at the root of our addictions.

The words (“came to believe”) at the beginning of the second step describes the process that most other people find in recovery.

First, I “came” to a place (a meeting, a person) where help was available.

Second, I “came to” my senses. I began to see clearly the effects of my character defects and harmful habits.

Third, I “came to believe” like others who found freedom through “a Power greater than ourselves” that I too might find restoration to “sanity.”

For some people their Higher Power is the group of people at the 12 Step meeting they attend. As participants “share their experience, strength and hope” they find GOD (good, orderly direction) to be valuable, hopeful and helpful. The wise man Solomon mentions the collective value in a “multitude of counselors” (see Proverbs 11:14; 29:6).

For me, I believe in the importance of learning from others and most importantly from the God of my understanding who is best revealed by the Son - Jesus Christ (who is now represented by the Holy Spirit). He is for me not just another Higher Power, He is my Highest Power.

Finally, I share one of my favorite promises. It is found in Paul’s letter to the Christian Church in Ephesus: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20).

Contributed by Ray Nelson, MDiv, MSPH, Midwest Area ARMIn Coordinator.
My name is Betty, a grateful daughter of the King, and I celebrate freedom from prescription medication misuse and many harmful behaviors.

Harsh circumstances surrounded my beginnings. My unwed birth mother had two children prior to me that she was unable to care for. While pregnant with me, she experienced domestic violence from the man she was living with, my birth father. Severely beaten and left for dead (according to birth family accounts), she fled, seeking refuge in a home for unwed mothers, completing her pregnancy and subsequently placed me in the orphanage for adoption.

I was adopted at age 2 months by a well meaning, older couple who had been unable to have children of their own. Two years later they adopted a boy.

Our family was poor. My hard working carpenter father was often out of town on construction jobs. My adopted mother gave up her nursing career to be a stay at home mother. My adopted father had come from a large rigid, dysfunctional family. I would learn at his funeral just how much pain he had suffered in his life. That knowledge explained many of his attitudes, actions, and beliefs.

From childhood pictures I seemed a happy child until grade 4. By that time, family dynamics were very broken. Due to my father’s upbringing and pain, we were isolated from family and community. There were many rules: be seen and not heard; do as I say, not as I do; just wait until your father comes home (more discipline would be metered out when he arrived home on the weekend for my misdeeds); don’t talk about our family with anyone, don’t talk...We became an isolated island even with relatives.

During the following years, until I left home, I developed a profound bed-wetting problem. This would result in daily strappings with a 2” leather belt before I left for school, after doing my laundry in the old wringer washer machine and tubs. My relationship with my adopted brother deeply reflected the family dysfunction and his pain.

My punishment always involved strappings, being sent to my shared bedroom for the night with bread (no butter) and water. Thus began my self-medicating to escape my reality: reading, stealing food, fantasy, blaming others, perfectionism, people pleasing and lying. Outside the home, I became involved in band, track and field, activities approved by my parents, so that I could be away from home longer than just the school day, although I was not permitted to go on band trips.

Being sent to academy at age almost 16 was a saving grace. Although I didn’t fit in, I was living in a sanctuary away from the home life. During that time, my internal pain was so great that I tried to overdose several times.

Over time, my self-medicating took many forms: people pleasing, stealing, lying, chasing relationships, perfectionism, misusing prescriptions and pills, religion, narrow minded thinking, control...

At age 41, successful in my career, yet in rabid turmoil in my interpersonal relationships on all fronts of my life, I hit a bottom. My belief was that it was everyone else’s fault. My adopted parents had disowned and disinherited me. I lived for many years with this knowledge before the last parent died. Nothing I did was good enough in their eyes. The ladder of their expectation always had extensions to it.

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Wasilla Alaska ARMin

Wasilla Alaska Grace in Carhartts Group

Approaches One Year Birthday

Freedom from Addictions: the title of the March 5-11, 2011 adult Sabbath School Lesson, sparked the beginning of the Wasilla, Alaska Grace in Carhartts Recovery Group. Drawing on resources from several 12 step programs, and Adventist Recovery Ministries, the group has found grace more abundant than they ever imagined. The group meets at 3pm each Sabbath at the Wasilla Seventh-day Adventist Church, at 2101 Lucile Street, Wasilla, Alaska. A printed leader’s guide allows any person to lead the group meeting. The words of the leaders guide describe the focus of the group:

This January 2012, the Adult Sabbath School class discussed the instructions in James chapter 5:16-20 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”. “We are doing just what the Bible says” said one of the members at the afternoon Grace in Carhartts meeting. Here is a place where redemption is alive and well, and grace abounds.

Journey to Wholeness Meetings at Benton Harbor

KPEP

After sharing a weekly relationship class at Benton Harbor, Michigan KPEP (Kalamazoo Parole Enhancement Program) for over three years, the Lord has blessed us with the opportunity to share the Journey to Wholeness program. The director of KPEP was excited to learn about this faith-based addiction recovery program; as just one week earlier an individual had resigned from teaching a similar program with KPEP women. Our first six weeks of Friday evening meetings have been a blessing and men in the program have genuinely seemed appreciative. Following each Journey to Wholeness session, the men are invited to stay for an afterglow (Bible study and prayer time). Most men consistently stay. We solicit prayers that the results of this endeavor will be obvious to both the men and women of the leaders guide describe the focus of the group:

May 31 is World NO Tobacco Day. (http://www.who.int/tobacco/wnd/en/) As we think back on the contributions of the Adventist church in the process of helping people recover from the addictive and destructive behavior of smoking we praise God for His guidance and for the inspired messages which we not only embraced but also were able to share with the World.

As a result, even today Adventists are recognized for pioneering the work in the fight against Tobacco and its harmful effects. However, smoking remains one of the most difficult to break habits. Despite the reduction of the prevalence from 1 in 3 people around the world who smoked in the 1960’s to now 1 in 5 there is still much to do. Studies show that this positive decline in smoking has stagnated, and particularly young kids and teenagers are targets of strong marketing campaigns.

A recently released US Surgeon General report on prevention of tobacco use among kids states that 9 out of 10 adults start smoking before 18 years of age. Thus, the tobacco companies invest 1 million dollars per hr in advertising to make it appealing to young kids. Isn’t that amazing? Is there something we can do? Yes! We cannot wait until they start smoking to then start recovery ministries. We must strengthen the protective factors for youth now (such as mentoring, creating positive adult connections, and service opportunities) in an effort to help prevent them from adopting such at risk behaviors at home, school and church.

Adventist Recovery Ministries is committed to not only to focus on recovery of such harmful habits, but also on prevention and awareness efforts. We are sending the message to kids and youth today that one way to Choose Full Life is to “Say NO to Tobacco”. Will you join us in this effort? (see www.NADhealthministries.org to download posters and other Choose Full Life materials.)

Betty C.

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