

Developing a Faith-Based Early Intervention Program for Adults with Alcohol and Drug Issues

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Introduction

Through my multi-faceted career as clinical social worker, alcohol and drug counselor, and pastor, I observed a gap between prevention and treatment in the faith-based service continuum of care in work with adults who suffer with alcohol and other drug (AoD) issues. Faith-based mutual-help groups and treatment programs occur in a variety of settings. However, no faith-based early intervention programs are available for adults who face legal or other consequences for their use of alcohol and other drugs. Pastors and church leaders often do not know where to refer adults with AoD issues, especially a program that embraces a faith-based perspective. Scripture proclaims that Christ sets people free from the chains that enslave them—including the chains of addictions.

The existence of a faith-based early intervention model is important because it has the potential to impede the development of more serious abuse or dependency problems. Such a model could reduce the number of repeat offenders, the numbers of people addicted requiring treatment, and negative effects on society.

The lack of such a model limits the church's ability to have a Kingdom impact on the development of addictions in local

communities. The opportunity exists for churches to work together to offer help that can make a difference through partnerships with other faith-based organizations to bridge the gap between prevention and treatment. Additionally, the creation of such a model has the potential for applicability nationally and internationally.

Biblical Understanding of Foundations, Attachments, and Responsibilities

An overview of the biblical concepts of foundations, attachments, and responsibilities creates the pathway for the ultimate solution to the problem of AoD issues—a love relationship with God, the creator of all humanity.

Foundations

Utilizing a building motif, footings and foundations undergird an entire structure. The strength of the whole structure depends upon the solidness of its foundation. The Bible presents an understanding of improper and proper foundations.

Improper Foundations

Jesus describes two foundations for one's life and their corresponding mental frameworks of wisdom and foolishness (Matt. 7:24-27). The wise person builds his

or her house upon rock, and when the storms of life come, it withstands them because of the formidableness of its foundation. However, the foolish person builds his or her house on the sand, when the storms come, it disintegrates due to the instability of its foundation.

William D. Mounce defines the Greek word for foundation (*themelios*) as “the supporting groundwork or base of a building or city, suggesting the permanence and strength of what is built on it” (p. 269-70). As illustrated in Matthew 7:24, 26, Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida connect understanding and wisdom with obedience in contrast to the connection between foolishness and disobedience (p. 383, 386). The attitude of disciples is obedience, contrasted with the foolish, whose lives are built on empty profession and external services, which cannot withstand the storms of life and fall in ruin. The surest way to withstand all the challenges of life is to build one’s foundation solidly on a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Proper Foundations

A proper foundation has God as its architect (Prov. 8:29-31; Heb. 11:10). B. A. Milne, on the connection between God’s righteousness and humanity’s relationship with God, conveys a crucial foundation:

One basic ingredient in the OT idea of righteousness is relationship, both between God and man (Ps. 50:6; Je. 9:24) and between man and man (Deut. 24:13; Jer. 22:3) ... righteousness implies a correct relationship to the will of God which was particularly expressed and interpreted by Israel’s covenant with God (p. 1020).

Therefore, God expresses the fullness of His righteousness in the context of covenantal relationship, a connection that calls humanity into alignment with God’s will through the vehicle of obedience—an impossibility without a proper foundation and healthy attachments.

Attachments

Having the foundation of one’s life firmly established in right relationship with God, one must also make a thorough examination of one’s attachments. Paul issues a warning about one’s attachments: “Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away. I want you to be free from the concerns of this life” (1 Cor. 7:31-32a, NLT).

Idolatry parallels addiction because it sets up a false attachment. Addiction often intersects with the ideas of disconnection and disorientation:

The fear of being unconnected can prompt ... relationships that tend toward the disorienting, the idolatrous. Addiction can be sin when it springs from these false orientations. It can be sin when it is primarily a refusal to orient self and will to God ... Even when addiction eventually takes on a biological life of its own, it may well have begun in a turning from God ... All sin is ultimately ignoring or turning away from God, a disinclination to be centered in the only Absolute. (Mercadante, p. 38, 42)

Addiction contributes to disconnection and disorientation due to the disloyalty and disinclination of one’s heart and entire life away from centralization in God. As the following section portrays, the Scriptures

provide instruction about idolatrous false attachments leading to slavery and healthy true attachments leading to freedom.

Idolatrous False Attachments Leading to Slavery

When communicating God's Torah to the people of Israel, Moses clearly addresses the issue of idolatry: "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:4, NASB).¹ J. A. Motyer, regarding idolatry, contends, "The OT views idolatry as a decline from true spirituality—the idol is whatever claims that loyalty which belongs to God alone (Isa. 42:8)" (p. 495-96). False spirituality occurs when one lives in loyalty to an idol that takes God's rightful place as the center and focus of one's life.

In creating false attachments, loyalty disintegrates into disloyalty, one's true identity in God fragments into a false identity, and one's disorientation leads to other wrongdoing or sin. False attachments come because of rebellion against God; they serve as a replacement of the true God with idols who fail miserably in comparison to the God who loves humanity and provides for its redemption and reconciliation.

Healthy True Attachments Leading to Freedom

The healthiest attachment is one's attachment to Creator God who hard wired humanity to connect in relationships, especially to the One who created them. Healthy true attachments lead to freedom. God refines and purifies individuals, thereby creating the freedom to establish healthy true attachments. The prophet Isaiah writes, "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake ... I will act;

For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another" (Isa. 48:10-12). Often God refines humanity through the afflictions experienced throughout life that give individuals the opportunity to examine their attachments—what is really important and valued—and their connection to God. This refining process strengthens healthy attachments, which leads to greater freedom as one yields to God's power (Rom. 6:17-19).

Responsibilities

After establishing a solid foundation built upon the bedrock of a right relationship with God and guarding the attachments of one's heart, an individual must take responsibility for all the issues in one's life. With the rise of the disease model of addiction, not taking responsibility for one's choices often gets blamed on the disease.² Ultimately, a person must guard his or her heart and take full responsibility for personal actions. Before transitioning to the rebuilding process, an individual must look backward to repair the broken areas of one's life.

Backward to Repair

King David penned one of the most powerful reflections of a contrite sinner's prayer for pardon and forgiveness. Nathan, the prophet, confronted David, who was responsible for the murdered Uriah and committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:1-15). Later, upon reflection, David writes, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:1-2). Mounce indicates that the Hebrew noun *peša* usually translated as "rebellion, offense, sin, transgression, normally denotes

intentional disobedience, especially against God's law. In all occurrences of *peša* 'the common thread is the breach of a covenant responsibility [relationship]' (p. 655-56). God desires to heal the brokenness caused by sin; however, a repentant heart and a moldable will are necessary ingredients in this healing process, as humanity cannot achieve this healing without God's involvement. David models the components of good repair work: a broken and contrite heart, a moldable will, humility, personal confession, and repentance.

As clearly stated in James 1:13-15, sin comes as a result of yielding to temptation:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death (James 1:13-15).

God does not tempt people to do evil; temptations come as a result of what is in each individual's heart. Regarding the origin of temptation, Louw and Nida state, "A person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own desires" (p. 374). The propensity toward sin flows from what comprises one's heart. David recognized the wickedness of his own heart and repeatedly prayed for God to search his heart: "Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart" (Ps. 26:2), and "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts" (Ps. 139:23). Additionally, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Each person must take personal responsibility for sin—rather than blaming God, Satan, others, a

disease, or circumstances—thereby taking a crucial step towards healing.

Forward to Rebuild

Having looked backward to repair, one can begin rebuilding. In Ephesians 2:4-10, Paul vividly contrasts humanity's condition prior to a relationship with God as having moved from being "dead in transgressions" to being "alive together with Christ." The biblical process of this transition is through repentance. Three portraits in Scripture illustrate different types of repentance: one from pressure, one from pity, and the last from persuasion based upon passion and truth.

The Old Testament book of Exodus contains the first portrait. Moses is called by God to go to the Pharaoh of Egypt to bring God's people, the Israelites, out of Egypt because of their suffering incurred as slaves (Exod. 3:7-10). Moses' initial appeals did not result in freedom, and Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen (7:13); ten plagues followed (Exod. 7-12). After the death of his firstborn son in the middle of the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron stating, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested" (12:31, NIV). However, after Moses and the Israelites departed, "Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services" (14:5, NIV)! Pharaoh's repentance or change of mind was from pressure most likely from his advisors, friends, and family—resulting in Pharaoh's death, yet life for the Israelites (vv. 8, 23, 28; 15:4, 19).

The second portrait is present in the NT Gospel of Matthew. The story depicts the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot (Matt.

26:14-16, 47-50). “When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders . . . Then he went away and hanged himself” (27:3, 5; NIV). The remorse that seized Judas led to despair and depicts repentance from pity.

The final portrait is the parable of the lost son contained in the Gospel of Luke. The younger of two sons demands his share of the estate from his father, who divided his property between them (Luke 15:11-12). He gathers all he has and leaves for a distant country, squandering his wealth in wild living and losing all his so-called friends. A famine ensued, forcing him to get a job—in the fields feeding pigs—not the dream job of a Jewish young man! He became so desperate that “he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything” (vv. 13-16, NIV). Finally he comes to his senses and knows he must return home: “I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father” (vv. 17-20). The prodigal son’s repentance depicts repentance from persuasion based upon passion.

Acknowledging and recognizing the truth of his heart and mind before God, he knew that he had sinned against God as well as his earthly father. It is this type of repentance—persuasion based upon passion of the heart and the truth of Scripture—that ushers one into freedom in Christ.

The biblical understanding of the foundations, attachments and responsibilities in regards to AoD is fundamental. It is also necessary for the church to function in early intervention.

Early Intervention: Importance and Role in the Continuum of Care

At the very core of recovery is the concept of personal transformation. Christopher D. Ringwald reflects on the importance of personal transformation:

Without a personal transformation, usually spiritual in nature, little happens over the long term. Addicts and clinicians told me that a spiritual life, of almost any kind, was critical to recovery Some psychologists recognize the deep personal transformations that are basically conversion experiences. AA presents its spiritual approach as one that can change a personality dramatically and, often, quickly when other methods fail (p. 27, 265).

Personal transformation is inseparable from the concept of living a spiritual life—since a vibrant spiritual life produces personal transformation—without it, a near impossibility.

The continuum of care commences with prevention programs often targeting children, adolescents, and college students—with a dual foci of decreasing risk factors for substance use/abuse and increasing protective factors. Mutual-help groups, inaugurated by Alcoholics Anonymous and later by Celebrate Recovery, emphasize addiction as primarily a spiritual illness for which the remedy is surrender to God, resulting in personal transformation.

A thorough literature review did not reveal any early intervention programs for adults who struggle with AoD issues, except the Ohio driver intervention programs, which traditionally serves a limited population. One reason for this gap lies in the narrow

definition and application of intervention. Historically, intervention has been viewed as an event with the goal of getting an individual into a treatment program embracing total abstinence. A holistic approach views intervention as a process of working with an individual to establish personal goals leading towards transformation.

Treatment programs follow intervention services in the continuum of care. Court mandated treatment can be effective. One program in particular, Celebrate Recovery-Inside has demonstrated its efficacy.³ Treatment outcomes can be improved with a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as integration of values and behaviors, which also serve as powerful relapse deterrents (Patra, et al.).

Early Intervention Program

In order to bridge the gap between prevention and treatment, a faith-based early intervention model targeting adults with AoD issues was created and offered over the course of a weekend (Thursday evening through Sunday afternoon) in a residential setting (as an alternative to incarceration at the discretion of the courts) utilizing a local hotel. The project provided an effective Early Intervention Program (EIP) experience for three individuals, who remain clean and sober to this day! While this does not provide statistical data to substantiate the effectiveness of the EIP, it resulted in the creation of an EIP model that can be replicated in other churches and faith-based organizations. The project implementation process opened the door for networking with several statewide organizations that will have fruitful outcomes for years to come.

The EIP's Contribution to Ministry

The EIP's greatest contribution to ministry was the successful development of a faith-based early intervention program with a complete complimentary curriculum and state recognition (licensure). Another contribution is best described as a Kingdom dynamic—the ability to connect other churches and the larger public sector to partner together in a variety of faith-based initiatives. Together, these faith-based initiatives facilitated a greater awareness of both the growing problem of AoD abuse and use and the need for collaboration between organizations in order to assist people in finding freedom from substance use disorders, learn how to remain free, and become productive members of society.

Recommendations for the Church

Even though a few churches utilized the EIP weekend as a unique outreach ministry, I would make several recommendations. First, in general, the church (also identified as faith communities) needs to become more accepting of the presence and reality of AoD issues. Too often a prohibitive dynamic exists—such as denial (“*that does not happen to our people*”), minimization (“*if it does happen, it is not that severe or widespread*”), deflection (“*dealing with that problem belongs to the professionals*”), or blaming (“*it is their own fault due to their bad choices, due to their sin*”)—which represses the church's ability to be viewed as a positive, helpful resource. The church may begin by embracing their role as a change agent, a Kingdom force to make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Second, more churches can utilize the EIP weekend or similar resource as a unique outreach ministry or domestic missions'

endeavor. The EIP weekend is a fee-for-service program, individuals paying for the program out-of-pocket. Since insurance companies and government agencies do not provide funding for the EIP weekend, churches have a unique opportunity to assist parishioners with funding via scholarships based on need.

Third, churches can explore participation in reentry initiatives.⁴ According to the National Institute of Justice:

In 2011, 688,384 men and women—approximately 1,885 individuals a day—were released from state or federal custody. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 4.8 million offenders were under community supervision by the end of 2011. Upon reentering society, former offenders are likely to struggle with substance abuse, lack of adequate education and job skills, limited housing options, and mental health issues.⁵

It is estimated that even more are released from local jails. Churches can engage in ministry by connecting with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, a state department of corrections office, local probation and parole

departments, chaplaincy offices in jails and prisons, or Christian organizations such as Prison Fellowship (PF). One of PFs ministries is reentry support, preparing prisoners for reentry into communities through “mentorships, life-skills training, marriage and parenting classes, and programs that teach biblical ways to live, so that when men and women walk out the gate, they’re prepared to thrive in their communities.”⁶ The church is uniquely positioned to offer these types of assistance.

Fourth, the church can offer a mutual-help group ministry, such as Celebrate Recovery,⁷ which is a Christ-centered recovery process with curriculum for adults, teens and children—a great opportunity to minister to the entire family affected by AoD issues. Celebrate Recovery provides training in its one-day seminars held throughout the year and its annual summits held on the East and West Coasts.

Through these recommendations, the church is uniquely positioned to care, love, and serve individuals and families to assist them in their desire for freedom, wellness, and wholeness!

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Endnotes

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from The New American Standard Bible.

² The American Society of Addiction Medicine defines addiction as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual phenomenon: Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors. Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.

³ "About CR Inside," accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.cr-inside.org/about.aspx>; and "History of CRI," Celebrate Recovery of Greater Jacksonville, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.crjacksonville.com/crinside.htm>.

⁴ *Reentry* refers to the transition of offenders from prisons or jails back into the community.

⁵ "Overview of Offender Reentry," National Institute of Justice, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/reentry/pages/welcome.aspx>.

⁶ "Preparing Prisoners for Reentry," Prison Fellowship, accessed November 20, 2015, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/reentry-support>

⁷ Celebrate Recovery, accessed November 20, 2015, www.celebraterecovery.com