

The Bible and...Addictions

28th June 2015

[Opening for a small group: Come up with a list of the top ten things that you think we can become addicted to]

Q. What is an addiction?

Q. Why can we become addicted to things?

Q. What does the Bible say is at the root of our addictions?

Being addicted to things is not primarily about our personality or about what has happened in our lives, although that can be a big factor. **It is ultimately about our hearts.**

Romans 1:21-25

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

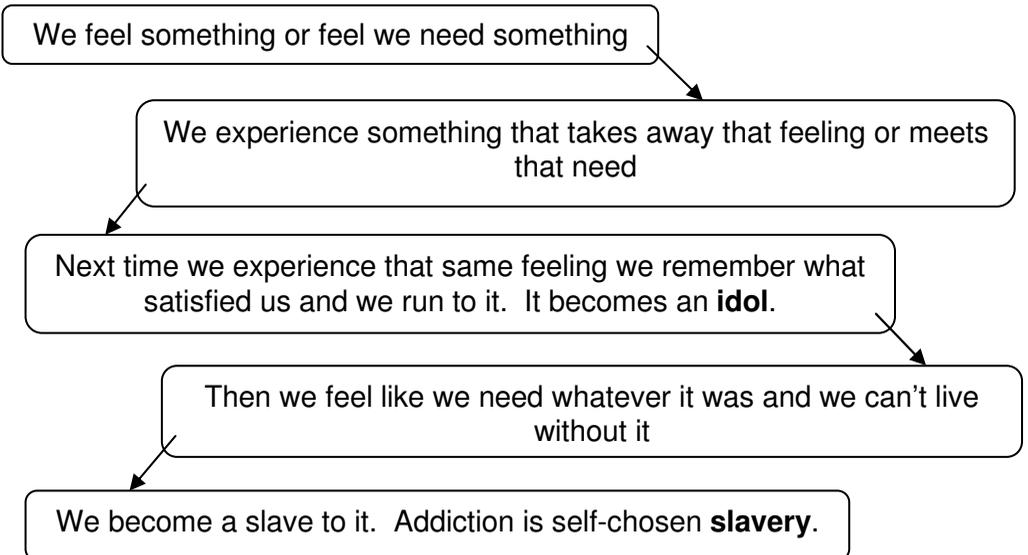
²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is for ever praised. Amen.

Ezekiel 14:1-6

¹Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me.

²Then the word of the Lord came to me: ³“Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them enquire of me at all? ⁴Therefore speak to them and tell them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling-block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the Lord will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. ⁵I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for idols.’

⁶Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!’



[If you have time in your home group talk through the table on page 4 and think about what the Bible says about each of those heart issues. How might we help ourselves and others to think about what God says about those heart issues? What might we

say? Are there specific passages or verses that we can think of that might help?]

Q What does the Bible say to us about overcoming addictions? How do these two verses help?

Jeremiah 2:13

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

John 6:35

The Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

A prayer for each of us to pray:

Lord Jesus, please help me to be satisfied in you, and by you, today. Amen.

Other things to pray this week

- Ask God, by his Spirit, to help us see the broken cisterns in our own lives and in those places to help us to run to Jesus, the spring of living water.
- Pray for anybody who you know who is trapped in any kind of addiction. Pray that they can begin to see and understand what is at the root of their addiction. Pray that if they don't know Jesus they will come to know him, and that if they do, that he will help them to trust, and find hope and joy in him.
- Pray for us as a church to be equipped to help anyone who is struggling with emotional pain, anger, guilt, bitterness, discontentment, loneliness, fear, depression and despair.

	Heart issue	What it looks like
The hurt, fearful shamed addict. Well known and most common. Addiction covers pain, guilt, shame, fear – stuff that hurts.	Bitterness	Somebody who has been hurt and rejected and continues to think about that pain. The hurt turns to bitterness or resentment. They are overly critical of themselves and overly sensitive to the criticism of others and turn to other things to avoid the hurts and emotional pain of everyday life.
	Guilt	Experienced from a conflict and the emotional pain that was never biblically resolved.
	People-pleasing, fear of man and love of approval	Filled with fear and trying to be perfect.
The angry addict. Angry with certain people. Sometimes hurt and fearful too.	Bitterness and guilt	See above
The bored addict. A way to feel more alive and above the ordinariness of daily life. Anger and entitlement might not be far away.	Discontentment with a desire for the 'quick fix'	Not being content with what God has given, but thinking that God has given them a 'poor hand'. In the 'quick fix' they seek pleasure while avoiding their emotional pain.
	Loneliness	God doesn't want us to be alone, but to use how alone we feel to draw us back to him.
	Depression and despair	Overwhelmed by the cares and responsibilities of this world.
The 'what happened' addict. Naive experiment or following friends.	Seeking approval?	See above
Four reasons for addictions – Ed Welch (CCEF website)	The Heart of Addiction: A Biblical Perspective – Mark E Shaw	

Facebook Obsession and the Anguish of Boredom

February 28, 2015

by Tony Reinke

Facebook has never been more addictive.

In 2013, it was 63% of Facebook users who checked in daily. In 2014, that number shot up to 70%. If you check Facebook day after day, you join over 864 million others with the same compulsive routine.

For many of us, Facebook is a kind of addiction, a default habit that is now rewiring our brains.

Ofir Turel, a psychologist at Cal State Fullerton, has the research to prove it. To make his point, he says Facebook addicts driving a car are more likely to respond faster to a push notification alert on their phone than to street signs. “That’s the power of Facebook,” he said.

Turel co-authored a study showing Facebook addiction engages the same impulsive regions of the mind as drug addicts, but with one significant difference. Facebook addicts, unlike compulsive drug abusers, “have the ability to control their behaviour, but they don’t have the motivation to control this behaviour because they don’t see the consequences to be that severe,” he wrote.

Many of you use Facebook and Twitter for noble ends, and this is to be applauded. Many of you are reading this post because of Facebook. But the self-evident reality is that Facebook addiction, like many addictions, is boredom-induced. Facebook is a place to turn when life gets drab, a digital slot machine we pull to win tokens of interesting news or funny videos. It’s designed to be this.

For many users, Facebook is the object we turn to, to satisfy our Boredom-Induced Distraction-Addiction (BIDA). This is when it becomes problematic.

Unhealthy Facebook addiction flourishes because we fail to see the cost on our lives. So what are the consequences of boredom-induced compulsive behaviours? Here are three to consider.

1. Facebook addiction stifles prayer.

There seems to be no study comparing the amount of time spent in social media to the satisfaction of one's prayer life, but all indications are that there's a problem brewing.

I recently asked Tim Keller, pastor and author of the new bestselling book on prayer, how widespread prayerlessness is. "This is anecdotal, but everybody I talk to seems so busy, and is communicating so incessantly around the clock, that I do think there is more and more prayerlessness, less and less time where people go into a solitary time or place to pray. I am sure we are more prayerless than we have been in the past." So what does that say about our spiritual health? "Our spiritual health," he responded candidly, "is in freefall."

When life gets boring, we increasingly turn to the surprises (and diversions) of our newsfeeds, not to prayer.

2. Facebook addiction clouds our self-perception.

Second, BIDAs like Facebook cloud our self-perception. This was the insight of seventeenth-century mathematician Blaise Pascal. When observing the youth in his day, he noticed if you "take away their diversion, you will see them dried up with weariness" because "it is indeed to be unhappy . . . as soon as we are reduced to thinking of self, and have no diversion."

Undistractedness and silence come with a heaviness we try to alleviate with frivolity, Pascal said. And so we are lured to distractions like Facebook, to be entertained, to fit in, to self-express — anything to break the weight of the silence.

Later, Pascal writes, "Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. There will immediately arise from the depth of his heart weariness, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, vexation, despair."

Without disconnected solitude, we cannot feel the weight of our need; we cannot taste our desperation for God. The weight of boredom is intended to open us to our insufficiency and to awaken us to our hunger for grace.

3. Facebook addiction blinds us to beauty.

As Facebook strategists know well, human beings cannot make peace with monotony. Try it. Your heart won't allow it.

We were not created to live in boredom. Our boredom follows from our sin, and our unalleviated boredom will eventually make us tremendously vulnerable to the lure of trivial distractions and corrupting allurements.

Sam Storms writes, "Boredom is contrary to the natural, God-given impulse for fascination, excitement, pleasure, and exhilaration." He warns, when faced with a life of boredom, you either die emotionally or "madly rush to whatever extreme and extravagant thrill you can find to replace your misery with pleasure, whether it be pornography, adultery, drugs, or fantasies of fame and power." Or in your boredom, you will turn to distractions that seem so innocuous as entertainment and the digital slot machine called Facebook.

How we respond to boredom says a lot about our hearts, and explains why we are so prone to addictive lifestyles and habits, Storms writes.

Many people who fall into sinful addictions are people who were once terminally bored. The reason why addictions are so powerful is that they tap into that place in our hearts that was made for transcendent communion and spiritual romance. These addictive habits either dull and deaden our yearnings for a satisfaction we fear we'll never find, or they provide an alternative counterfeit fulfillment that we think will bring long-term happiness — counterfeits like cocaine, overeating, illicit affairs, busyness, efficiency, image, or obsession with physical beauty. They all find their power in the inescapable yearning of the human heart to be fascinated and pleased and enthralled. Our hearts will invariably lead us either to the fleeting pleasures of addiction or to God.

This same allurements is behind the “big” addictions, the “little” addictions, and every addiction in between. In the words of an old axiom, idle hands do the devil’s work. But more fundamentally, the bored are quick to make peace with sin. Whatever distraction temporarily alleviates our boredom becomes our ethical blindspot. There’s the problem.

The Cure for Our Boredom

For creatures like us, created to adore glory, we must find an object worthy of our worship. The cure for boredom is not diversion or distraction, but substantive enthrallment, says John Piper. We must encounter God, “to be intellectually and emotionally staggered by the infinite, everlasting, unchanging supremacy of Christ in all things.”

Which means that trying to silence our boredom with the compulsive habit of pulling the lever on the slot machine called Facebook is a habit that can be broken. But that will only happen if our compelling vision of God is grand enough to see him as beautiful and “infinitely creative,” so creative, that for those who worship him, Piper says, “there will be no boredom for the next trillion ages of millenniums.”

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Books

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The Dangerous Duty of Delight, John Piper. Copies are available at the back of church (£2.50 each)

The heart of addiction: A Biblical Perspective, Mark E Shaw.