

Youthful Experimentation & Addictions

(appropriate for High-Schooler and older)

Michael R. Daily, December 2014

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

What is youthful experimentation? What things do some youth experiment with? (Make a list on the board)

Why do people do it? Perhaps if you try things once you can gain the experience and once won't hurt will it?

But what does God say?

Romans 13:12-14

The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

No provision, not even once. Why does God take such a hard line?

The reason is there is a powerful force at work. What is that force? It is a force far more powerful than hormones.

What is it? Your Memory

If you have a painful experience, it gets burned into your memory. The same with a pleasurable experience.

Because our flesh has a memory, any experience it has will be remembered. A behavior that brings feelings of pleasure but that is destructive will be remembered by the flesh for a long time – perhaps a lifetime. The more experiences like these you have the more “temptation baggage” you’ll have. The fewer experiences the better.

This is why God tells us to be wise in what is good but innocent in what is evil. Firsthand experience of bad things is not helpful or necessary and is actually harmful.

Romans 16:17-19

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. 19For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

Obedience brings freedom, sin brings additional baggage that continues to try to enslave.

For example, studies have shown that couples who married as virgins are happier than those who had many partners before marriage. Because of memory you may find that one person kissed better than your spouse, another did something else better, and it steals your joy. Not having those in your memory allows you to enjoy your marriage.

Examples of Addictions and Compulsions

Anorexia / Bulimia	Cutting	Gambling	Alcoholism	Drugs
Sexual perversions	Pornography	Video games	Workaholic	Overeating
Vandalism	Shoplifting	Shopping	Violence	
Instant messaging	Computer / internet addiction		Compulsive exercising	

Addiction comes from the Greek word “addictus” (to surrender to the gods). It is essentially idolatry which means putting something first in our lives other than God.

Colossians 3:5-7

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, 7and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

Addictions form when we turn to ourselves to solve problems instead of turning to God. An addiction is something that enslaves a person (the person is not in control), it is a behavior that is damaging to the person, and it is a form of escape or an anesthetic for the emotions.

Addictions to a substance or behavior are motivated by seeking pleasure. The addiction can be a stimulant (gambling / shopping) or a tranquilizer (TV watching, excessive exercise).

Compulsions look similar to addictions but are motivated by seeking a relief from pain. In other words a person must engage in the behavior or tension rises. Example: Cutting.

Addictions and compulsions may look similar on the outside but the driving mechanism is different. For example, a person may be addicted to shopping because of the pleasure it gives them or they may feel compelled to shop to relieve pain.

Behavioral Addiction

A behavior takes hold because it works – it provides a level of relief from pain or a sense of pleasure – an escape. It initially gives the person a feeling of control – I found a way to take care of my pain or lack of pleasure by myself – it appeals to our flesh to think that we can have control.

Proverbs 21:17

He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

This is the first error – we should turn to God and his promises for our problems.

II Corinthians 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

Matthew 26:41

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Before long the addiction becomes something we think about all the time and have to make excuses for. The sense of control is slowly turning into enslavement. The addiction becomes the central part of life – it is the constant focus of our internal thoughts – we may hide it but it consumes our heart and mind.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Enslavement is complete when you think that no one understands you or could love you if they knew who you really were, leaving you isolated and alone.

I Peter 2:11

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Biological Addiction

Some drugs lock onto the neurons in the brain and act like a pump, so the neurons release more neurotransmitter. Other drugs block reabsorption or reuptake and cause unnatural floods of neurotransmitter.

All drugs of abuse, such as nicotine, cocaine, and marijuana, primarily affect the brain's limbic system. Scientists call this the "reward" system. Normally, the limbic system responds to pleasurable experiences by releasing the neurotransmitter dopamine, which creates feelings of pleasure.

What Happens if Someone Keeps Using Drugs?

The first time someone uses a drug of abuse, they experience unnaturally intense feelings of pleasure. The limbic system is flooded with dopamine. Of course, drugs have other effects, too; a first-time smoker may also cough and feel nauseous from toxic chemicals in a tobacco or marijuana cigarette.

But the brain starts changing right away as a result of the unnatural flood of neurotransmitters. Because they sense more than enough dopamine, for example, neurons begin to reduce the number of dopamine receptors.

Other neurons may also make less dopamine. This is called "down regulation". Because some drugs are toxic, neurons may also die.

After enough doses, an addicted teen's limbic system craves the drug as it craves food, water, or friends due to the effects of down regulation.

Without a dose of the drug, dopamine levels in the drug abuser's brain become abnormally low. The abuser feels flat, lifeless, depressed. Without drugs, an abuser's life seems joyless. Now the abuser needs drugs just to bring dopamine levels up to normal. Larger amounts of the drug are needed to create the dopamine high, an effect known as "tolerance".

By abusing drugs, the addicted teen has changed the way their brain works with long-term, if not permanent, negative effects.

The end result of drug addiction is typically misery, enslavement, poverty, and an early death.

II Peter 2:18-19

For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,¹⁹ promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

At best the addict is left with a constant temptation to do drugs again – often for the rest of their lives.

Conclusion

Addictions and compulsions occur when we turn to something other than God to help us deal with our problems – which is idolatry.

Youthful experimentation may seem harmless but it is a great way for satan to fill your memory with fleshly experiences he can use later to tempt you over and over.

The best way to avoid not only addiction but also the temptations that lead to addiction is to not play with it – not even once.

In addition, drugs that cause biological addiction are difficult to overcome because of the rewiring of the brain (i.e. damage) that occurs as well as the temptations that come from memory.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Youthful Experimentation & Addictions*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Romans 13:12-14*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

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