

How to stay on the path to addiction or **The Path to Maturity**

By Dave Batty

Have you ever met someone who said, “My life goal is to become a drug addict”?

“I believed I wasn’t worthy enough or good enough for God to love me, or forgive me,” shared Lynne. “I always believed I would die and go to hell. God really didn’t love me like everyone else.”

Kreg came to know Jesus in his youth, but then got involved with the wrong friends. “I started using drugs, and with that came feelings of guilt that overwhelmed me. I felt I had betrayed God and done too much for God to forgive me. I felt hopeless and unworthy. I felt like I had used up all my chances to get help from God. I was convinced that I would always be an addict.”

Why do so many people find themselves trapped by problems and addictions instead of finding the path to maturity—the path to real life?

- ❖ **How do false beliefs connect to addictions?**
- ❖ **How does your response to problems set you up for the path to addiction or the path to maturity?**
- ❖ **How do your relationships with other people hinder or help your maturity?**

Even though the Bible clearly states that God loves everyone, and wants to help those who are broken and troubled, so many people have lost hope.

“When I was 8 years old my whole world was turned upside down when my mother died,” shared Debbie. “When she passed away, I felt like something inside of me died

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too. I was so mad at God because He took my mother away from me.”

“I started smoking cigarettes at 11 and hanging out with the wrong crowd. It wasn’t long until I was smoking marijuana, and drinking alcohol. At 16, I started looking for love in all the wrong places, doing what ever I could to fit in with the crowd.

“It wasn’t long until I was addicted to cocaine, slowly killing myself. I lost my relationship with my father and my friends. I ended up homeless, living in a basement with no heat or water.”

God wants everyone to experience life to the full—life with joy—life with purpose—a life of

success. Many end up on another path—one that leads to addiction.

So what are the key characteristics of this path to addiction?

Step 1 **The path to addiction is marked by living with false beliefs**

Every person living with an addiction is living with false beliefs. The same is true for those who live with any life-controlling problem. Anyone who gives in to a temptation to sin is living with false beliefs.

These false beliefs take different forms—denial, delusion, running from pain, believing a lie, running from the truth.

“I believed you could be your own God,” stated Donna. “I was sure that God wasn’t interested in me. I believed Satan was supreme. The life I had lived led me to believe that I wouldn’t be good for anything.”

Many of those who end up in addictions are convinced that they don’t really have a problem, and don’t need help from anyone else. Yvonne was a dental assistant, looking for a little more joy, and started writing her own illegal prescriptions for medication. She wasn’t ready to get help until the police arrested her and charged her with 196 felonies.

Others, like Lance, have lost the joy of living. "I've dealt with severe emotional insecurities most of my life," shared Lance. "My self-worth was at the point of self-hatred. I believed to the core of my being that no one loved me, especially God. I thought I was ugly, dumb, doomed to

False beliefs lead us down the paths of frustration and pain. We find ourselves caught up in magical thinking—looking for the quick fix, rather than real solutions based on God's truth.

failure. I was absolutely, totally hopeless."

False beliefs look great, but when we act on them, they always leave us with less.

Step 2

Those on the path to addiction do not respond to problems in effective ways

Our culture spreads the myth that the good life is one that is free of problems. Buy the newest car, or the best clothes, and you will be happy. The impression is left that if you really have a successful life, you won't feel any pain. But problems come—and some stay!

When drugs "Help"

When the news media does a story on legalizing drug use, they frequently interview someone who states in a very convincing way that this drug really helps them deal with the problems in their life. But the truth is—this person is living with false beliefs. The very thing they believe is "helping" them is actually hurting them.

"Whenever a problem came, I would run and hide," stated Barb. "As I child, I was sexually abused. I was told I was trash, and would always be trash. So I turned to what I knew would hide the pain—drugs, alcohol, and sex."

Another young person shared, "I lived with a lot of anger and hate. The only way I could deal with my problems without getting angry was to use drugs."

"I had good intentions on doing the right things with my life," shared Javier. "But curiosity of drugs soon

became an obsession which would overcome me. After the high was over, the guilt would set in, and send me running to use drugs again so I wouldn't have to face my problems. But getting high to escape the original problem only created more problems."

Those on the path to addiction often use false beliefs in determining how to respond to their problems. Many simply ignore their problems.

"Whenever I had a problem—when I felt slighted, frustrated, or scared—I always tried to numb my feelings," shared one young person. "I'd have a cigarette, or food—something to numb my pain. Eventually I turned to drugs and alcohol to comfort me."

Problems unresolved only grow bigger—setting one up to turn ever more frequently to drugs and other addictions. "Unforgiveness, bitterness and resentment sent me down an 8 year path of crack addiction, ending with a suicide attempt," shared Lynne. "Instead of running, I wish I had turned to God."

Step 3

Those on the path to addiction are living with dysfunctional relationships

It is God's desire that every family be a safe setting for children to grow up and learn how to have healthy relationships with other people. However, the sad truth today is that many children are born into very damaged homes and grow up with unsafe and immature people. Without positive role models they often find themselves betrayed and damaged by unsafe relationships.

Even more, instead of discovering the life of freedom and success, they find themselves trapped by addictions and life controlling problems—living with a sense of

"Isolation took me down. I was confident I didn't need anyone's help, and yet overwhelmed by my problems." —James

despair and hopelessness. People on this path get stuck, they fail to mature even though they are getting older biologically.

When three drug addicts were asked how old they felt they were on the inside, they responded—"I feel like I'm 10." "I feel like I'm 16." Yet all three of these men were 30 - 45 years old, married, with children.

When one starts to use drugs, their emotional development typically stops.

The harder they seek for happiness with drugs, the deeper they become trapped in their addictions,

and the more damage they bring into their lives.

Those on the path to addiction often isolate themselves, or choose friends who are also involved in drug use. These toxic relationships feed on false beliefs and ineffective patterns of responding to problems.

The Bible speaks about people who have not grown up, who are still immature. ¹¹“We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

(Hebrews 5:11-14 NIV)

It’s clear that God has marked out for us a path that leads to maturity. Our challenge is to discover that path and do what He wants us to do so we can become mature and complete. Let’s look at three key steps on this path to maturity.

The Path to Maturity

Step 1: Living in the truth

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6 NIV) We need to learn to live the life Jesus gave us. He has all the truth.

Jesus also said, “Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32 NIV) This word “know” had two meanings in the times of Jesus. You can know information about someone or something—head knowledge.

However, Jesus was using a different definition—knowing through experience. Jesus was saying, “When you take my truth and put it into action in your life, and you experience this truth in your daily living—then that kind of truth will set you free.”

The path to maturity requires that we live out God’s truth in our daily experiences. ¹³“Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

(Hebrews 5:13-14 NIV)

For some, the challenge to live in God’s truth is a battle in the mind. All kinds of false beliefs invade our minds. We have to attack them with the truth. “We take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV)

We need God’s help to live in truth. We also need the help of others to live in truth.

way. And how does God want us to respond to problems?

²“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV)

Learning healthy problem solving skills is an essential key to healthy living. Every problem is an opportunity

We promise ourselves we will never do that again. But a few days, weeks, or months later, we find ourselves back again. Discouragement sets in. “Why doesn’t God help me?”

to live in the truth. Every problem offers you a choice—to follow God’s truth or to follow Satan’s way.

Each problem is a test for your faith—God’s power to help you with these problems. Many of these problems are too big to overcome in your own strength. This may be a tough lesson to learn—especially when we believe we can fix it.

Paul learned this lesson through experience. He talked about facing huge problems. “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.... But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.” (2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV) Every problem is an opportunity to discover how big is God, and how He can help us grow stronger. This is the true path to maturity—through problems.

If we fail to learn how to solve problems with God’s truth, we will stay stuck in our immaturity.

Step 2 The path to maturity goes through problems

The path to maturity is not problem free. Quite the opposite—God’s path to maturity is filled with problems. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)

If we are to achieve the maturity that God desires, He requires us to learn how to solve problems with His truth and in His

Step 3

The path to maturity is through relationships

You can't go it alone on God's path to maturity. You need healthy relationships to become a mature person.

The two greatest laws in the Bible both deal with healthy relationships. First, you are commanded to "love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30 NIV) Second, you are commanded to "love your neighbor." (vs. 31)

All the other laws in the Bible are based on these two commands. (Matthew 22:40) You cannot obey these two most important commands unless you are living in healthy relationships with God and other people.

You deceive yourself when you think you can become mature and complete all by yourself. Healthy relationships with other people are an absolute requirement for healthy living.

Finding safe people, and building friendships may be a difficult challenge, but it is not impossible.

The only way to find real joy in life is to live in God's truth daily, facing each new problem with a sense of confidence that God is here today to provide all the power and all the wisdom needed to overcome each problem. Throw away the magic wand, and get to work. It's hard work going down God's path to maturity, but it is well worth the effort.

This path to true maturity also requires that we live in healthy relationships with healthy people. As we do this each day, with time, we can achieve God's plan for us—we can become "mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:4 NIV)

How to stay on the path to addiction or The Path to Maturity Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Isaiah 44:20.
 - A. How hard is it for you to spot false beliefs in your life?
 - B. What or who has helped expose some of the false beliefs in your life?
2. Read John 8:32. Give an example from your life where you have seen God's truth set you free. Or give an example from your life where you need God's help to set you free.
3. Read Hebrews 5:11-14.
 - A. Are there areas of your life where you still have a hard time living it right consistently?
 - B. According to verse 14, what is the key characteristic of a mature person?
 - C. What is one area in your life where you have made progress in training yourself to distinguish between good and evil? (vs. 14)
4. Which of the three steps to maturity is the greatest challenge in your life today? What can you do to move ahead in this area?
 - A. Living with God's truth in your daily activities.
 - B. Responding to problems in the way God wants you to.
 - C. Developing healthy relationships with safe people.



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