



FAITH FIGHTING ADDICTION

A PROGRAM OF GASTON CONTROLLED
SUBSTANCES COALITION



A LITTLE SHAME GOES A LONG WAY

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It is so easy for families to tell addicted persons "You should be ashamed." Intense frustration, despair and grief, coupled with the hope that "tough love" will jar their loved ones into a state of clarity, can produce this phrase. But people with addictions will tell you they already feel boundless shame and the statement, "you should be ashamed," is likely to add to the toxic brew that is already feeding their destructive behaviors. Addicted persons use their addiction to help soothe their pain

and ease their stress, even if it's for a short time.

During her TEDTalk, *Listening to Shame*, psychologist Brene Brown says her research reveals dysfunctional conditions like addiction, depression, anxiety, bullying, suicidal thoughts, and eating disorders are highly correlated with feelings of shame. She differentiates between guilt and shame. Critically, she says, people who feel guilt often think, "I am sorry, I made a mistake," while those who



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feel shame are prone to think, "I am sorry, I am a mistake."

Shame may be especially acute for persons of faith who see their addiction as a betrayal of family, friends, and the Lord. The church can compound shame when her members do not understand the profound effects addicting substances inflict on the body and the mind. This can lead to simplistic assessments. The addicted person is told "just get their mind right" and "move on!" When these individuals and families feel judged by their church, and if the church withholds its support, it only adds fuel to the fire.

Christians can combat the shame brought on by addiction by first

understanding how the mind is hijacked by addictive substances. This acknowledgement does not mean enabling the habit or removing the person's responsibility to get treatment. It means recognizing the difficulties of addiction and recovery with compassion and insight.

Christians can also combat shame by recognizing that recovery has parallels in how salvation is presented in scripture. Our popular traditions may imply a spiritual epiphany is all that is needed to beat addiction. A re-dedication of one's life or an anointing and laying on of hands will enable one to leap over the process of recovery. To be fair, there are times when this is the case. Yet, if we look at the biblical



picture of salvation, we often see a moment of clarity or decision (*Rom. 10:9-10*), a process of growth (*Phil. 2:12-13*, *2 Corin. 3:18*), a continual transforming of the mind (*Rom. 2:12*), struggle (*Rom. 7:19*, *Gal. 5:16-17*), and failure (*Eph. 4:30*). Struggle does not mean one's faith is inauthentic. By extension, recovery may contain all of these same elements, and the person struggling with addiction needs support just like the believer struggling with sanctification.

Local churches can combat addiction by being the body of Christ, encouraging families and individuals touched by addiction, "...rejoicing with those that rejoice and mourning with those that mourn..." (*Rom. 12:15*). We can walk with those hurting like Jesus walked with

Jairus (*Mark 5:24a*) on the way to heal his daughter. The book of Genesis records it was not God's original intent for shame to be part of our lives, (*Gen. 2:25*). Yet, as a result of the Fall, shame intruded into the human experience (*Gen. 3:8-11*). However, in an often overlooked text, the Lord made garments for Adam and Eve (*Gen 3:21*). We can picture God taking the time to fashion garments to protect and comfort Adam and Eve, even in his grief. It is clearly an act of grace and mercy.

As a church, we must do our best to offer grace to those struggling with addiction, to let them know their struggle does not define who they are in light of God's love. They may have made a mistake, but they are not a mistake.