



Substance Abuse Prevention

SUNDAY

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GALATIANS 6:1-2, CSB



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The Christian's Call to Care for Addictive Populations

BY SUPRIYA G. REDDY

As a public health professor, Christ-follower, and substance abuse researcher, my vocation demands that I consistently reflect upon the intersection of faith and efforts that are intended to protect the needs of the population.

Addiction can present itself in many forms. An individual may be struggling with prescription drug use, the use of illicit substances, sexual addiction, overeating, or tobacco and alcohol use, just to name a few. The repercussions of engaging in these behaviors often results in devastation for both the user and their loved ones.

Oftentimes, the general populace may not think of addiction as a disease. While there is a spiritual component, in actuality, it is a disease that is complex and chronic in nature and affects the functioning of both the brain and body.

Stigma, especially in regards to addictive behaviors, occurs when negative attitudes toward those suffering from substance use disorders arise on account of the disorder itself, and are likely to impact physical, psychological, social, or professional wellbeing.

Stigmatization is an issue we must work through both personally and as a society, but we cannot allow it to be a barrier to gospel ministry. Regardless of how you may perceive the culpability of those who suffer from addiction, Christians should continue to affirm their dignity as image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:26-28). Addicts may be resorting to the things of this world to satisfy, but we know they were made for so much more. We know, and are reassured, that Christ is the only one who will satisfy (Heb. 6:19). Being intentional in caring for this hurting population can provide a God-glorifying opportunity to share the gospel.

Caring for those who are suffering from addiction is not an endorsement of sin, gluttony, or the use of illicit substances. When Jesus called us to care “for the least of these” (Matt. 25:40), I believe it includes those who are in destitute and destructive situations. Being present in the lives of those who struggle with addiction provides us with a beautiful opportunity to love people in the midst of their affliction and point them to the One in whom true satisfaction is found.

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