

“HELP MY CHILD/SPOUSE IS AN ADDICT!”

Probably everyone knows more than one person who could say (yell) that line. The historical number of individuals who wrestle with alcohol and drug addictions has been exacerbated by pornography and gaming addictions online. This can leave parents/spouses feeling overwhelmed, helpless, fearful, and guilty and questioning how they ended up there. Hours/nights of sleep are often lost worrying. Depression and anxiety can often accompany this process.

With that reality so visible and present in our culture, how can we learn to cope more effectively and support others as they journey with a loved one who wrestles with an addiction? There are a few thoughts that come to mind. Safety, prayer, boundaries, consequences, talking and love come to my mind.

Safety is critical for the family; if there is physical abuse, separating yourself (and kids) from the situation is necessary. It is hard to help if you are in the hospital or not there for them or the rest of the family.

Prayer is not simply some spiritual quip but rather a true foundational practice for everything else. Prayer is the outpouring of our heart through communication with our Lord and Savior. It is here we can unload our burden first and tell God everything we are thinking and feeling and how painful and helpless/hopeless we feel at times. It is a place to listen to HIS still small whisper or voice of discernment and direction. He can lead you and support you through the journey. Ask for wisdom; ask for courage to follow through. Let God comfort you. He knows what it is like to be disappointed, feel abandoned, betrayed and abused.

Jesus understands precisely how we feel because He went through the same types of situations we do. Though details of our lives may not match His, the experiences and feelings are alike. Let's look at several examples of how He identifies with us:

- Misunderstanding: People constantly misunderstood His claims to be the Son of God.
- Rejection: He was unappreciated by the ones He came to love and die for.
- Pressure: Crowds surrounded Him, begging for help and demanding His attention.
- Exhaustion: He experienced all the weakness of humanity.
- Loneliness: At Gethsemane, when He needed human companionship the most, His closest friends fell asleep.
- Temptation: Satan hit Him with every imaginable type of attack and temptation.
- Hatred: Religious leaders despised Him.
- Injustice: Though Jesus lived a sinless life, He died a criminal's death.

- Pain: He suffered the excruciating pain of scourging and crucifixion.

Whatever you're going through right now, remember that Jesus knows how you feel and sympathizes with your pain and weakness. He may not remove the anguish or change your situation, but He'll always give you the grace to resist temptation, endure suffering, and grow in spiritual maturity.

Taken from "Our Savior Understands" by In Touch Ministries

Hebrew 14: 14-16 Jesus the Great High Priest

14Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, f Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Boundaries and consequences often times are first cousins in the process of how we relate to others. Boundaries, (The best resource on this topic is "Boundaries" by Cloud and Townsend, Zondervan 2017.) are the ability to say no to things and people in your life and place conditions around when you say yes and no. i.e. "Son we want you here and there is an open door for you, under the condition you are sober." Often times boundaries come with consequences with the loved one who wrestles with addictions. Maybe you no longer bail them out of hard places by trying to cover up or lie for them, or no longer give them any financial resources – at times including not giving them a place to sleep. As a parent it would be really hard to offer the homeless shelter – and yet after a period of being taken advantage of with no reasonable attempt or effort at change on the addict's part, the offer of the homeless shelter may be one of the most caring/loving things you can do to help them see the consequences of their addiction. Allowing addicts on parole or probation to continue to use without reporting them is hating them and not loving them. Allowing the family member who has not yet come in contact with the law, to continue risking their own life and other's lives while using without consequences is the exact opposite of love. It is called hating them in the bible. Proverbs 24 says The one who does not discipline his son hates their children, but the one who loves is careful to give consequences (discipline) to them.

Talking may sound silly but can be incredibly helpful. Many families wrestling with the issues of addiction carry shame and guilt that leads to a code of silence about the problem or the person wrestling with it. Families may see talking about it as a betrayal (often time propagated by the addict themselves.) Finding a good, trustworthy friend or counselor and beginning to share the burden you feel can be incredibly helpful. There is an old maxim that says, "You are only as sick as your secrets." We are made in the image of God and one of the core pieces of the Imago Dei (image of God) is relational. Even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in relationship, we were created in their image for relationship with Him and others. Having a trusted sounding board can remind you that you are not crazy, fill you with courage to face another day, and take some of the weight from your shoulders simply by sharing your burden with someone else. Al-anon is a group specifically designed to help loved ones dealing with an addict. It can be a great place of support. Many churches have small groups that can be a great

support as well. And of course Compassionate Christian Counseling is a great place to start talking with someone who cares and can walk with you through some of the struggles you are wrestling with as you try to get a firm foundation for healing or changing the dynamics of the relationships you are part of.