

## **It Shouldn't Be This Hard: Challenges to Overcoming Addiction**

*Dr. David Hawkins*

*Editor's Note: Do you need sound, Biblically-based advice on an issue in your marriage or family? Dr. David will address questions from Crosswalk readers in his weekly column. Submit your question to him at: [TheRelationshipDoctor@gmail.com](mailto:TheRelationshipDoctor@gmail.com).*

"When I decided to come to this Eating Disorders Therapy Group, I didn't think it was going to be this hard," the young woman said to me with more than a hint of disappointment in her voice.

More than forty pounds overweight, feeling disgusted with her body image and discouraged about yo-yo dieting, she came to the group hoping for a miracle.

"It seems like letting go of these stupid habits ought to be easier," a man added with disgust. Having struggled for years with obesity, he too wanted a miracle.

After completing my book, *Breaking Everyday Addictions* and having spent time as the psychologist on a drug and alcohol inpatient unit, I knew it was time to apply my knowledge of addictions to people suffering from eating disorders. I wasn't prepared, however, for their resistance to change.

"You don't understand how hard it is to change," another woman said angrily, after explaining how her lap band surgery had been a disappointment. Looking at me, eyeing my body, she then challenged me.

"Since you've probably never had an eating disorder, I doubt you can understand what it's like to fear food, enjoy using laxatives and diuretics, and wish for anorexia."

"You're absolutely wrong about that," I said frankly. "I'm an addict, too. I've struggled for years with work and approval addiction. I attended a recovery group for seven years. My addiction nearly killed me. I've relapsed and paid the consequences."

For a moment there was a silence in the group. Then the woman persisted.

"But, anyone who hasn't had an eating disorder can't possibly understand what we're going through," she continued. "It's just about impossible to change our habits."

"No, it's not impossible to change your habits and you must get beyond feeling misunderstood and victimized," I shared. "We're all addicts to one thing or another. Everyone can understand to a certain extent. Everyone feels teased and tempted by their addiction. It is terribly hard to change, and accepting that is an important part of recovery. It may never be easy."

"It still doesn't seem fair," another woman added.

"Your addiction is to food," I shared. "Many of my clients are addicted to drugs or alcohol or gambling or sex. They don't think it's fair either. We all come to our addictions through different means," I said. "Some have hereditary predispositions. Others were raised in an environment that fostered a particular addiction. Some simply began experimenting with a substance or process, thinking they were safe, and ended up trapped. They continued their destructive habits until the habits became more powerful than them. But, we can't camp on feelings of unfairness. We're not victims and we must take responsibility for our recovery."

Again, stillness fell over the group as they considered my words. They had come to my group secretly looking for more quick fixes, the kind offered on glossy television ads.

- "Lose a pound a day for thirty days."
- "Drink your way to being thin."
- "Everything you need to know to look the way you want by Christmas."
- "Seven secrets to being thin for life."

And on it goes. Simple solutions that always disappoint. Quick fixes that never fix, and are never quick. Empty promises.

How could I share the truth that no one wants to hear: that healthy eating, a healthy body image, and healthy exercise habits are the only path to healthy living? How would I tell them again that the path to healing would be difficult, not easy? Every step was likely to be challenging, but we would share our experience, strength and hope to healing change.

Perhaps the most difficult step in any addiction recovery process is facing the truth--we're all addicts. But the Scriptures offer hope: "The truth will set you free" (John 8: 32).

Addictions are filled with lies:

- "I can keep doing what I've always done."
- "I'm not doing anything too hurtful."
- "I'm not hurting anyone but myself."
- "There is a magic pill or answer that will solve everything."
- "Faith alone will heal me."

But, these are lies--destructive, harmful lies. They are part of the DENIAL--*Don't Even Notice I Am Lying*--that keeps us trapped in our addiction. Since truth sets us free, lies keep us trapped. That there are *no quick fixes. Recovery is a lifelong, challenging process--for everybody.*

There is another powerful tool that every addict must face--*surrender*. We must give up the illusion that we're in control, our lives are manageable, and someone will come along and rescue us from ourselves. We must surrender childish beliefs that recovery is easy. We must stop avoiding the difficult work of recovery, resisting what is challenging and secretly hoping for magical answers. Freedom comes after we surrender and accept the fact that we must do the hard work of recovery. We must attend meetings, call friends, enrich our spiritual lives, read about and understand our particular addiction and be held accountable.

If you're struggling from an eating addiction or some other process/substance addiction, recovery is possible but won't be simple. Recovery will get easier as you uncover the lies you tell yourself, wrestle with the self-destructive habits that keep you hooked on your "stuff," and as you reach out for support to change old habits. You don't need to live alone with your secrets, especially the ones you know are killing you.

So, here's the deal: let's all hold hands and promise not to judge each other for our secrets. Let's take turns admitting our self-destructive habits, offering encouragement and constructive feedback. Let's end enabling, pretending we're not dying when you know we are. Armed with honesty, healthy tools and determination, we can live beyond addictions. Gathering in our Celebrate Recovery/ AA/ NA/ GA/ OA community support groups, we allow God to loosen the chains of addiction.

Finally, remember: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1: 7)

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*[David Hawkins](#), Ph.D., is the founder of the Marriage Recovery Center. He has worked with couples and families to improve the quality of their lives by resolving personal issues for the last 30 years. He is the author of over 18 books, including [Love Lost: Living Beyond a Broken Marriage](#), [Saying It So He'll Listen](#), and [When Pleasing Others Is Hurting You](#). His newest books are titled [The Relationship Doctor's Prescription for Healing a Hurting Relationship](#) and [The Relationship Doctor's Prescription for Living Beyond Guilt](#). Dr. Hawkins grew up in the beautiful Pacific Northwest and lives with his wife on the South Puget Sound where he enjoys sailing, biking, and skiing. He has active practices in two Washington cities.*