

A Personal Story of Addiction

Tammy: Have you ever been so drunk that you can't remember what you did the night before? Or have you ever said, "I'll never have another drink!" only to find yourself reaching out for that alcohol again and again and again?

Carol: Maybe you know someone who has caused trouble or become violent . . .who has lost their job, their home...their health...or their mind, all because of alcohol?

Tammy: Maybe you've seen marriages and relationships destroyed because of too much drinking. The consequences are huge....

So, why then do they keep drinking?

Carol: Hello my friend. I'm Carol. It's good to be together again on Women of Hope. Thank you for having us.

Tammy: I'm Tammy, and our friend Diane is here with us. Diane has worked a lot with people who have alcohol addictions, but she knows about it in a more personal way. Welcome Diane.

Diane: Thank you Tammy.

Tammy: Did you hear that question? With all of the negative consequences 'Why do they keep drinking?' What would you say, Diane?

Diane: There's a short answer: Addiction.

I knew addiction well. It was part of my life for many years. Actually, it controlled my life. I became a slave to it. For most of my childhood I was sexually abused by my father's best friend. I then spent twenty years addicted to cocaine, marijuana, alcohol... sex, work... and whatever else helped me cope. Anything to keep my mind off the pain and hurt deep inside me!

Those addictions brought even more pain; I had several abortions, and several very bad relationships. At 34 yrs of age, although I had a good family and a good job, my life was a mess.

I found it hard to function in my family and in my community. I didn't trust anyone. I had a secret that I kept trying to hide from everyone; but the people closest to me knew there was something wrong. Several of my friends talked to me and told me I needed help from a doctor or a counsellor. But I didn't believe them. I was fine! I didn't need help. Or so I thought.

What would it take to get me out of this vicious cycle of addiction?

Carol: Diane, explain to us what you mean by a 'vicious cycle of addiction'?

Diane: I'd like to share with you the way I experienced the addiction cycle. You see, no one ever explained this cycle to me when I was younger. I was never taught very well how to cope with pain. In my family, when there was pain, we were taught to 'be strong' 'don't talk about it' and it will soon go away. That works sometimes, but with deep emotional pain and damage, it won't "go away" until we do something about it.

I like to explain my addiction cycle this way. There are 5 steps. If you look at your fingers, we'll use each finger to explain one of the steps. That might help you to remember them. Let's start with your thumb.

Let's say the thumb represents PAIN. For me, when I used alcohol and drugs I was trying to get rid of the pain I felt. Sometimes it was physical pain...sometimes emotional pain...sometimes it was both. It was a bit like hiding your thumb underneath the other four fingers on your hand. If I was drunk or used drugs, then I could pretend the pain wasn't there – like pretending my thumb didn't exist because I couldn't see it. The problem is that when I was sober, the pain (like my thumb) was still there and still attached to me. It never went away! No matter how I tried to hide it or deny it. I knew I couldn't stay drunk all the time but there were days when being sober was just too painful.

Pain is a natural part of living in this damaged world. Christians believe that this pain began because humans decided to turn away from God and live life their own way.

Tammy: Yes: we still do this, and there is still a lot of pain in the world. I don't need to tell you what pain is. Every human being has felt pain in some form. It can be physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual pain. You and I know – pain hurts and we try to do everything we can to get rid of it.

Diane: Let's move through this addiction cycle using the rest of our fingers so we can remember these steps. The thumb is pain; now let's move to the next finger and point with your pointing finger. I call this second step the Reaching Out step

In order to cope with the pain, we point, or reach out for something close by to rescue us from that pain. We point away from the pain itself and reach for something to *cover* it up. Some way to *ignore* it, or *deny* it, or *take* our attention *away from* it.

Tammy: Now I am beginning to understand where this is going. You mean...alcohol and drugs?

Diane: Yes: but people reach out for many different things: it might be food, or sex. It might be achievement and success in work. It might be exercising constantly to build up a strong body. Some people cover up pain by *controlling* others and the world around them, or by *pleasing* others. Some of us focus on someone else's pain instead of our own pain. A lot of us cover it up by making sure we *look* good. And we try very hard not to think about the pain.

Used in the right way, most of these things are not bad – we need food, exercise, work, and relationships to live a healthy life. Certain drugs can save our lives if they are used under doctor's supervision. Even in the Bible an older man tells his young friend to take a little wine for his health problems.

However, when we *use* these things too much, or we feel we *have to* use them to rescue us from pain, we *ab-use* them. These everyday things then begin to work against us instead of for us!

Carol: OK, so the thumb represents the pain that we try to hide, the pointer finger represents the things we use to take our attention away from the pain.

Diane: Right! Let's move to the middle finger now. This is called Temporary Relief – Notice the word *temporary*. It doesn't last! We *think* the thing we are abusing is solving the pain – making it go away- but that is not the whole truth is it?

Let's say I feel hurt because my father says some horrible things about me. I can cope with that pain in two ways. I can pray about it, then speak honestly with my father, come to an agreement together...and I forgive him...

Or I might choose not to think about the pain, not to talk to him about it – and *not* to forgive him! And then I might reach out for something to make me feel better for the moment, so I don't have to deal with the pain of what just happened. That might be one of those things I mentioned earlier like alcohol, or drugs.

For a while in my own life, using alcohol or drugs seemed the better choice. I may have felt relief for a little while from the pain my father caused. But one thing was for sure, if I didn't talk about the problem directly with him, it would never go away, and that pain would just get bigger and bigger – and I would need more alcohol or drugs. This is what I did and the addiction cycle continued!

Carol: Friend, I wonder if *you* have gone through that cycle that Diane is talking about. A cycle that starts with some sort of pain. Then, you're reaching out for something close by to take that pain away. Finally, you feel the temporary relief but it doesn't last long and you need more to cover up the pain.

Diane: Let's move on to the fourth finger – the ring finger. This next step is what I call the Negative Consequences – the bad results of being addicted.

Because the *brain* is altered by drugs and alcohol, who knows what kind of effect it might have on the person? What if that person ends up in a fight and hurts someone? What if they walk into a place that's not safe while they're drunk? In their family or community, how many people might suffer because of their hurtful words or actions? The money that should be saved, or spent on food, clothing or housing is now being wasted to buy more alcohol or drugs.

When a person drinks alcohol, the alcohol immediately enters their bloodstream and begins to affect the physical body in so many ways. Can *you* think of any effects?

Tammy: Some of them are easy to see – the drunk person slurs his words, he can't walk straight, he often vomits or has diarrhea, and he gets a bad headache. Sometimes he falls over or becomes sleepy or unconscious.

Carol: And he makes stupid decisions, says stupid or hurtful things, and often he can't remember what happened while he was drunk.

Diane: That's right. But if he gets drunk *often*, the *unseen* damage becomes worse. For example, large amounts of alcohol are poisonous. His blood pressure gets high and he might have a stroke. His heart is damaged, and so is his liver. His brain is damaged and that can't be fixed, so he forgets things and gets confused. He doesn't think very well. The nerves can be damaged so he can't feel properly. He doesn't function well sexually. He doesn't eat properly or digest his food so he gets malnutrition and anaemia. He might even get cancer of the mouth and throat. People *die* from the effects of alcohol. But it's very hard to stop, because the more you use alcohol, the more you train your brain to 'need' it and the more your physical body will come to rely on it to function.

Tammy: Wow, that's a really bad picture. I'd hate that to happen to me, or someone I love.

Carol: And think about the bad things that happen while people are drunk! Accidents, injuries, falls, violence in the street or in the home...

Diane: ... fights, cruel words, sexual assaults, broken families...

Tammy: ...broken lives – for the drinkers, and the people around them.

Diane: The list of bad results goes on and on. If only someone had told me about all this years ago. I can't find anything good about drinking alcohol now...can you?

Carol: And yet, so many people continue to suffer.

Diane: Finally, we come to the little finger, the last step in this addiction cycle. *Guilt* and *shame*. When a drinker experiences any of these bad results, they will begin to feel extremely *guilty and ashamed*. I found it hard to look at myself and see anything good when I was drinking. I lost any confidence in myself and my life appeared hopeless.

This guilt and shame added even more emotional pain to the pain that started the cycle in the first place. I was back to my thumb, back to the beginning, and round and round and round it went – each time the *pain* getting bigger & bigger! And each time reaching out for something more to get rid of the pain. I was stuck in the cycle!

Tammy: OK Diane, I think we want to know . . . how did you break this *vicious cycle*?

Diane: I can honestly say that without God's help, it wouldn't have happened.

This is where you have to start – *admit that you have a problem you can't defeat!* There is a world-wide movement to help alcoholics, called Alcoholics Anonymous. They talk about 12 steps to healing, and many psychologists & counselors agree on this first step: you have to *admit that you have a problem – and you cannot fix it*. This is absolutely essential to breaking the cycle of addiction.

I had to admit that I was living life on *my* terms and *not* the way God created me to live ...in healthy, loving relationship with God and with others. And I couldn't change, even though I tried really hard.

That's what the Bible teaches too! Paul, one of the Bible writers inspired by God, wrote these words: "I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right but I can't." (Romans 7:18 NLT)

Only God can start the healing process. Again Paul wrote: "For God is working in you to giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2:13 NLT)

When we come to believe that, and ask God to come into our lives and take over, *then...*with His help and with the help of others, we can begin to deal with our *pain* honestly and directly.

Sometimes, suffering teaches us to get down on our knees, to cry out to God in our troubles. God promises to hear our cry and He can do for us what we cannot do ourselves.

Our loving God cares for you. He knows the pain you're going through and He alone has the power to rescue you. Talk to Him about your pain, let Him help you.

Our lives are like... a big fruit tree. But sometimes, that tree may get a disease. Cutting off the bad fruit won't get rid of the disease. It only gets rid of that piece of fruit. You have to get to the roots of the tree and treat them or you'll just keep getting more and more bad fruit.

If you are afraid to look at the pain straight on, then the cycle will keep going on and on. If you say there is no pain, then this cycle will keep going on. To become the person God created you to be, you must stop being afraid to face your pain. God's Word says, "God did not give you a spirit of fear or timidity but of power, love and a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

Sadly, many people would rather stay miserable than be set free. Not many people are willing to deal with the deep pain in their soul. Why? Because it's hard. It might mean we have to forgive someone who hurt us, or confess the truth and tell our secret. It might mean we have to become totally responsible for our own lives! Or we may have to change something we'd rather not change.

But I tell you the truth. Those who dare to face their pain, with God's help, are the ones who understand and experience what the Bible teaches – that 'if you know the truth, the truth will set you free.' (John 8:32 NLT) I came to know that Truth and the Truth *has* set me free. God says, again in his word, that 'if God (the Son) sets you free, you are truly free' (John 8:36 NLT)

15 years ago, I was set free from my addictions and I began to learn how to cope differently with pain. I accepted the invitation from Jesus Christ; He promised to forgive me for all my sins, heal me and set me free from years of abuse, addictions and pain. He is always with me because He promised: "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." (Heb 13:5 NLT)

I am living a full and useful life now, serving others and helping them to come to know Jesus, my Healer! ...and my God!

I believe you too can live a full and useful life. You can live happily and successfully, free from all addictions. I say that because I know it's possible. It will not be easy at times but *it will change your life!*

If you're ready to stop drinking and you're willing to get the help you need, you can recover from alcohol abuse—no matter how bad the addiction or how helpless you feel. Whatever you are addicted to, you don't have to wait until things get worse; why don't you get help and start *today?*

Carol: Diane, you said the first step is to admit to God that you have no power to change yourself. It's not only alcoholics who need to admit that. We all have areas of our lives where we are powerless, and so we all need to come to God, humbly, and confess our addictions and our sins. The great news is that God is just waiting for us to reach that point. He loves us and he longs to forgive us and give us a new start. We can ask God to make us strong each day to live good, clean lives.

Tammy: That doesn't mean we'll never make mistakes, but it does mean we have God's power to get up and start again. Diane, thank you so much for telling us about your life today. I pray that we will all be encouraged to break that cycle of addiction, with God's help. There is hope!

Would you like to tell us something about your life? You can contact us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope.

Tammy: We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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