

A 500-Pound Gorilla

A social problem families and congregations must deal with in our society is drug and alcohol addiction. Christians are taught to *Be kindly affectionate to one another...* (Rom. 12:10), and the apostle Paul writes in Galatians 6:10 ... *as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.* What would “doing good” look like when dealing with someone with a drug dependency problem?

When one becomes addicted, the person experiences an unimaginable craving, both physically and mentally. It is like battling the proverbial 500-pound gorilla; almost always a person will need help to overcome addiction. We invited Doug Teffeteller from Peninsula Hospital to help us more effectively minister to people with drug and alcohol addiction. Doug has twenty plus years of experience treating people with addiction, plus he is a former alcoholic himself. Doug offered a few simple guidelines proven effective in ministering to those with drug and alcohol addiction. We want to share some of the points he shared with the elders, ministers, and deacons last Saturday.

1. The first point to remember is the person with an addiction must really want to change their lifestyle.
2. Deal with an addict's behavior. Avoid labeling someone with an addiction as an addict, alcoholic, abuser, etc.
3. A person with an addiction cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Verify every statement they make.

4. Do not do anything for people with addictions that they can do for themselves. To do more than this enables them to continue their lifestyle. An Addict can somehow travel hundreds of miles to get drugs, but will ask someone to give him/her a ride a short distance to make a purchase.
5. Provide only tools and encouragement. For example, give a telephone number where a job may be available, but don't make the call for them.
6. Hold a hard line until there is clear and definitive evidence they are serious about changing their behavior and overcoming their addiction.

These measures may seem uncaring and are characteristically unnatural to Christians who love all people, especially when an individual is a member of the Lord's body. But doing what is good for a person's spiritual and physical well-being is sometimes initially painful. We understand this when we let our small children attempt to walk for the first time, knowing they will fall or permitting the doctor to treat them, knowing the treatment will hurt. We want to help those with addictions do what is in their best interest, both in the here and now and in eternity. Dear God, help all of us truly do what is good when we minister to those with drug dependency problems.

A few copies of a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services document, *Keeping Youth Drug Free*, are available in the church office.

For the elders (Don Denton)