Virtues and Vices

“God has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.”

(2 Peter 1:4-5).

Introduction

Although addiction is a prevalent disease that has plagued humankind for countless generations, many people remain blind to the power it can exert in our lives and the destruction it can cause to individuals, families, neighborhoods, schools, and communities. At St. Joseph Institute we are invested in providing effective education to our residents and their families because we believe it gives them a formidable weapon in their struggle against this destructive force that threatens their wellbeing and their lives.

Many residents who have graduated from our program told us that we “saved their lives” and prepared them to live with a fullness that they never dreamed was possible. Because our educational program for residents has become a vital part of their recovery, we wanted to offer a similar, albeit abbreviated, educational program for their family members and support people. To that end we published a Family Program Manual that describes each of our nearly 30 specialized recovery education classes.

The attached article is an outgrowth of our explanation to family members about our Recovery Education class on Virtues and Vices. It encapsulates our philosophy on the importance of Christian spirituality as a foundation for recovery from substance abuse and dependence.
Virtues and Vices in Addiction and Recovery

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans issues an “urgent appeal” for us to “wake from sleep,” saying: “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:12b-14).

From a Christian perspective human beings can be guided by two different natures: we can follow the sinful human nature that leads to debauchery and licentiousness, OR we can respond to the call to live according to the divine nature through our belief in Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:4). The Bible uses two important words to describe the behavior associated with our sinful nature – debauchery and licentiousness. One who is licentious lacks legal or moral restraints. They have an “anything goes” mentality which leads to immoral or illegal behavior. Debauchery goes hand in hand with licentiousness.

Michael Houdmann describes debauchery as “the habitual and unrestrained indulgence of lust and sensuality.” It is a morally deteriorated state that many refer to as “partying” today. “It encompasses several aspects of unholy living, including but not limited to sexual immorality, drunkenness, crude talk, and generally out-of-control behavior.” The dictionary describes debauchery using the archaic (old and no longer used; relating to ancient times) definition of “seduction from virtue or duty.” In other words, those who engage in debauchery have lost touch with their sense of moral integrity and their commitment to duty.

We often see this affinity for debauchery in our residents, regardless of their drug of choice. They talk about “partying” and “hooking up” (one night stands) with a sense of excitement, as if carousing and drunkenness were acceptable behaviors. Even the tone of the words “partying” and “hooking up” implies activity that is lighthearted and fun – a message that is vastly different from the tone implied by the words licentiousness and debauchery. If you have engaged in debauchery and licentiousness, you at least know that you have committed sinful behavior. In a standard dictionary or thesaurus the word party has synonyms such as “praise, bless, honor, glorify and rejoice.” This is completely different from the definition of party found in the Urban Dictionary which states: “When everyone gets together at someone's house to get drunk, consume illegal substances like weed and coke, and trash the place completely.”

If you understand that indulging your sinful nature is wrong, then moral integrity calls you to turn away from such behavior and feel sorrow for your sins. Unfortunately, some of our residents are morally bankrupt, and they have no concept of feeling appropriate guilt for wrongdoing. Even after they enter treatment, they still congregate among themselves, and tell war stories that glorify their drug use. Their behavior is like that described by St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians, “many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; … Their end is destruction; their god is their belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19). [It is important to note that not all of our residents fall into
this category. Many have come to know Christ and are ashamed of their past behavior. In fact, part of the wounding they carry is their inability to forgive themselves for what they have done.

However, those who lack moral integrity act like fools, failing to use the intelligence and reasoning skills which God has given them. Psalm 14 denounces godlessness, saying:

Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

Sacred scripture discusses the difference between those who are foolish and those who are wise, indicating that we can choose how we will live. Believers put on the mind of Christ, and rely on the Holy Spirit to help them reject foolishness, and instead make decisions that glorify God (1 Corinthians 2:14-16, Ephesians 5:15-20). Believers know that “his divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness.” We accept “his precious and very great promises, so that through them [we] may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3-4). In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us that those who are called recognize Christ as “the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:24-25). Jesus, as the wisdom of God, is the “image of the invisible God” and “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created” (Colossians 1:15-16). He is the original source of wisdom, and ongoing access to wisdom is provided to us through him.

According to the Bible, debauchery is countered by wisdom which was created by God at the beginning of his work, and remained “beside him, like a master worker; … rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (Proverbs 8:22, 30-31). Wisdom is characterized by intelligence, holiness, beneficence, and steadfastness. She is “all-powerful and oversees all” (Wisdom 7:22-23). “She is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works” as “the active cause of all things” (Wisdom 8:4-5). “She teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these” (Wisdom 8:7). These are what we have come to call the Moral Virtues: prudence, justice, temperance (self-control), and fortitude (courage). It is these virtues – along with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love) – that are the focal point of this class on virtues and vices.

The intention of the class is to help residents recognize the difference between making foolish choices vs. wise choices, and living in the darkness vs. living in the light. The key ingredient in manifesting a change in their lives is to first acknowledge the weakness in the existing pattern. Until people see and admit the error of their ways, they are doomed to repeat old behavior patterns. In presenting the list of the Seven Deadly Sins during this class, our intention is to help residents acknowledge their foolish choices, and recognize how they have lived in the darkness.
associated with their addiction. The hope that we offer is the opportunity to embrace Christ who calls them “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Hope comes through our belief in Jesus as our Savior, and through our efforts in living a virtuous life by turning away from sin, and practicing the virtues that help us imitate him as a role model for righteous living. This class begins with a review of the Seven Cardinal Virtues to attune residents to the characteristic behaviors associated with goodness and light. Residents learn the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. They also learn the four moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. The moral virtues guide us toward reason, and they control specific wrong tendencies:

- **Prudence combats:** poor judgment and inappropriate choices
- **Justice combats:** selfishness, greed or favoritism
- **Temperance combats:** self-indulgence and excess
- **Fortitude combats:** excess fear or reckless behavior

Often it is one or more of these “wrong tendencies” that need to be corrected in order to protect a person’s recovery. For example: a person might see that poor judgment and inappropriate choices are problematic behaviors for them, and that continuing these behaviors will threaten the success of their recovery. They might then pray for the virtue of prudence, and develop ways to practice that virtue in their lives. This process makes them proactive in their sobriety, and it creates an alliance with God, inviting him to be a co-worker with them as they embark on the journey of recovery.

The purpose behind presenting this educational material is to allow residents to acquire insight into their old, destructive patterns; and learn new ways of being that will combat the behavior they want to stop. Embracing the virtue gives them something to move toward as they learn to move away from the vice. This concept is exhibited in the following diagram.

![Diagram showing the axes of Virtue and Vice with opposing goodness]

Generally, we encourage residents to recognize and move toward virtue, while letting go of their affinity for sin – debauchery and licentiousness. To provide further clarification in achieving this outcome, we introduce residents to the Seven Capital Virtues that directly counteract the Seven
Deadly Sins. In the following diagram, the sins are listed and aligned in order with the most deadly at the top and each of the corresponding virtues represented in the adjoining list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Deadly Sins</th>
<th>Seven Capital Virtues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pride (arrogance)</td>
<td>• Humility (modesty, selflessness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-righteousness</td>
<td>• Kindness (admiration, compassion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disobedience</td>
<td>• Forgiveness (mercy, patience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Entitlement</td>
<td>• Diligence (zeal, integrity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Envy (jealousy)</td>
<td>• Charity (giving, generosity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wrath (excess anger, revenge)</td>
<td>• Temperance (self-control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sloth (apathy, inactivity, sadness)</td>
<td>• Chastity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greed (insatiable desire)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gluttony (over-indulgence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lust (excess sexual appetite)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This class concludes with a review of each of the Seven Deadly Sins, along with a description of the sin and the ways it can manifest as part of an addiction. The examination of the Seven Deadly Sins begins with pride – the most serious of the seven because it often leads to the commission of other deadly sins. There are numerous synonyms for pride: arrogance, self-righteousness, disobedience, stubbornness, rebelliousness, and entitlement to name a few. The bottom line is that prideful people think they know best, and they refuse help or feedback from others. They continue to make the same poor choices that led to their addiction, and keep them trapped in the self-destructive cycle. Pride fuels denial – the great obstacle to recovery.

Envy is more than jealousy. Envy occurs when a person feels unjustified sorrow and distress about the good fortune of others, and desires to bring about their downfall. Those who are envious have a malicious intent. Envy is an outgrowth of the bitterness held in a person’s heart when they continue to focus on what they want and cannot have. Envy can be an underlying contributing factor in the development of addiction. It can also be a destructive force in recovery, when the person builds resentment toward others because they are able to drink socially without becoming addicted.

The deadly sin of wrath is akin to anger, but wrath goes beyond anger to a point of seeking vengeance on a person who has not deserved it, or expressing rage that originates from an improper motive – perhaps based on jealousy or greed. Anger that is balanced by reason is not a sin. It can, in fact, be righteous when the intention is to correct a wrong. Jesus demonstrates righteous anger when he goes into the temple court and drives out the moneychangers (Matthew 21:12-13). It can be quite effective for someone who suffers from addiction to have anger toward their disease because the energy of the anger can keep them mindful of what their disease has stolen from them, and make them vigilant in the work they need to do in recovery. However, harboring anger toward oneself or others is both self-destructive and harmful to relationships. Certainly, anger that moves into bitterness, resentment, and revenge is clearly sinful and ill-advised.
Next to pride, sloth is the sin that has the most detrimental impact on recovery. One who is slothful simply fails to put forth any effort to accomplish earthly tasks, and has no inclination to pursue the wellbeing or enhancement of their soul. They are throwing away their earthly life and their opportunity for eternal happiness. Recovery requires diligence and ongoing effort. Sloth prevents a person from doing the work of recovery. It is a sentence for failure in recovery and failure in life – both temporally and eternally.

Greed is a sin of excess in which an inappropriate value is placed on the desired object. It is an obsession with material possessions or material wealth. It may also manifest as an uncontrolled desire for power or prestige. Greed is an outgrowth of selfishness, and it is a sin against justice. Greed may inspire other sinful actions such as hoarding, theft/robbery, trickery and manipulation. Greed leads to blindness about wrongdoing, causing you to see evil actions as the “norm.” This then blurs the line between right and wrong, leading you into the downward spiral of addiction. Greedy individuals often have an addiction to money, and having money in their pockets fuels the temptation to spend it on drugs and alcohol. Through the negative thoughts and behaviors associated with greed, the disease of addiction is fed. Greed places a barrier between you and God, blinding you to the call to live a godly life. Without God, perseverance in recovery is extremely difficult.

Gluttony is a sin of over-indulgence, consuming too much and exercising no temperance or self-control. Gluttony gives you an appetite for excess. This lack of temperance and moderation feed your addicted brain, triggering you to drink or use by minimizing the detrimental impact that this type of excess has on your body/mind. Over-indulging in one area can lead to a pattern of over-indulgence in other areas. This creates the potential to substitute one addiction for another: food for alcohol, alcohol for drugs, drugs for alcohol, and so on. Like greed, gluttony has no sense of satiety – enough is never enough.

Lust is an impure desire of a sexual nature. It consists of an insatiable need for sex or things of a sexual nature, including thoughts, desires, and actions. Lust is a driving force behind debauchery and licentiousness. It fuels your appetite for sexual pleasure, and it creates the same bodily sensations as addictive substances. When lust is present, sex acts like a drug and triggers your addicted brain. It is, in fact, a form of cross-addiction. The chemicals released through sexual attraction act just like drugs. When uncontrolled, as they are in lust, they disrupt your physiological functioning and trigger the voice of your disease, leading to the thought: “I might as well drink or use.” Sex can also be used as an emotional release or an escape, allowing you to continue acting from your wound, instead of dealing with your issues. As soon as you stop dealing with your emotions, you set yourself up for relapse.

The Seven Deadly Sins are the enemies of recovery. They feed and excite the Downward Spiral of Addiction which often begins with an uncontrolled appetite that causes you to seek pleasure from food, alcohol, drugs, sex, or gambling – anything that creates a euphoric high. This surge of pleasure gives you an easy out, a means of temporarily escaping the pain and difficulties of life. It leads to the deadly sin of sloth which fuels the downward spiral of your addiction. You find it easier and easier to escape from your pain through the euphoric high of the addictive substance,
and you stop dealing with life on life’s terms. Your addicted brain has taken over your life, and drug seeking becomes your primary focus. You crave your drug of choice, leading to gluttony. Your drug use promotes denial which is a form of pride, and you remain trapped in your addiction.

Clearly addiction is a disease that must be addressed on all levels of a person’s being because its insidious nature penetrates the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of life. Recognizing the underlying power that sin exerts on the disease of addiction is an essential component to successfully waging war against this menace that leads to a life of debauchery and licentiousness – a life that separates us from God.

Residents are warned that the Seven Deadly sins cause them to slip back into the darkness of their active addiction. In that darkness, their disease talks to them, and allows their addicted brain to control their behavior. It wears down the will, and over time that immature “tendency to seek pleasure” occupies their thoughts once again. Their ability to make good choices becomes more and more limited. Selfishness takes over, fueling a pattern of discounting and denying evil tendencies. They “normalize” these tendencies in their brain, and they lose their connection with the moral virtues that keep them strong in their recovery: prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude.

While learning of virtues and vices, residents are reminded of the CompassionateCare model they learned as a means for understanding the True Self.
Residents of our program are reminded that the Seven Deadly sins are great sources of evil. They cause deterioration of the True Self and impair the functioning of its various aspects. The Seven Deadly Sins:

- Overpower the **Feeling Center**, causing emotional regression and fueling impulsivity.
- Seize control of the **Reasoning Mind**, cultivating cognitive distortions and rationalizations that contribute to active addiction.
- Influence the **Intuitive Mind**, creating fantasies that glorify drug use and promote relapse through worldly temptations that veil the wisdom of God.
- Weaken the **Will** as it listens to the dysfunctional input from feelings and intellect, and ignores the will of God.

Residents are made mindful of the **voice of addiction** that is powerful enough to override good judgment and steal away the skills they are taught at St. Joseph Institute, thereby contaminating their recovery. This **voice of addiction** is fueled by the Seven Deadly Sins, and it will put their sobriety at risk.

Residents are encouraged to live in the light, and protect their recovery like the precious gift that it is! We recommend that they build insurance for their recovery by cultivating virtue, including the Cardinal virtues and the Capital virtues. They are instructed to guard against the Seven Deadly Sins by noting which sins have the greatest tendency to attract them and control their lives. We recommend that they prioritize these sins, according to the negative influence they exert in their lives, and make a plan to guard against each sin. We encourage them to maintain the belief: “I cannot permit that sin in my life because it fuels my addiction, and jeopardizes my recovery.”

Those who struggle with addiction are wise to arm themselves with the power of God by cultivating a relationship with him and learning to practice virtue in their daily lives, remembering that:
Humility: opposes pride
Kindness/Admiration: oppose envy
Forgiveness: opposes wrath
Diligence: opposes sloth
Charity/Generosity: oppose greed
Temperance/Self-Control: oppose gluttony
Chastity/Purity: oppose lust

As part of the Family Program we encourage you to examine your own life with respect to the practice of virtues and vices. Honestly, notice how your lifestyle is influenced by these factors. Reflect on how your decision to pursue virtue can assist you in developing a strong, cohesive force that fortifies all of you as a family in recovery. You might just see how the struggle with addiction can become a blessing in your life, making you more committed to living in the light and accepting Jesus’ call to “repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). After your time of reflection, complete the Worksheet section.

Jenny Sheetz, MA, CN, LMT
Founder & Clinical Director
St. Joseph Institute
jsheetz@stjosephinstitute.com
What did you learn about How Sin Impacts Addiction?

- How has your life been influenced by vice?
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  __________________________________________
  __________________________________________

- How has your life been influenced by virtue?
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- Which are the sins that threaten your spiritual wellbeing?
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- Which virtues do you need to practice to promote a healthier lifestyle?
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- How do you plan to integrate those virtues in your daily life?
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- How will the practice of virtue help you as a family in recovery?
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