

Addiction – why is it such a struggle?

Whether we are prepared to admit it or not... most of us are addicted to something. If you're unsure about that, ponder on this definition of addiction from Gordon Dalbey:

“An addiction is something you do consistently to avoid facing the truth about yourself.”

(Read over that a few times... allow it to sink in!)

So now, let me ask, when pressure comes on you... what habit, or escape, or comfort, or way of 'busyness' do you consistently run to, rather than go to Father God for comfort and help? And what is the truth about yourself that you are unwilling to face? Or allow Jesus to heal?



Those are the questions that need answering if we truly are to be free from our addictions.

My personal understanding of how essential those questions are to this topic has come from learning about addictions through this ministry that I serve and also from the impartation of two key men. The first of those men is Gordon Dalbey. He has been a personal friend and mentor who has invested into me from time to time over the last decade (something I am very thankful for). Regarding this topic on addiction, I'd like to highly recommend his book 'Fight Like a Man' wherein he unpacks many powerful truths on this key subject and in particular how shame impacts on addictions.

The other man who has influenced me greatly on this subject is Gerald May. I've never had the privilege to meet this man, however, he has passively mentored me through his excellent book "Addiction & Grace" which carries powerful insights.

What I'll share with you from here on will draw significantly from both of these men of God from their abovementioned books, and from my experience in ministry at Ellel Ministries.

For most people who come to us trapped in some form of an addiction, they are not always just held captive by what we might refer to as a 'classic addiction' like alcohol, nicotine, drugs, sex or food. Addiction can have many faces, especially if it is something we are substituting to avoid letting God reveal a deeper level truth about ourselves that we have never wanted to face.



Examples of other types of addictions might include:- another person (codependency); or addiction to a style of music or a certain artist; to a sport or activity; etc... it's something you do consistently to avoid facing the truth about yourself.

If we dig deep enough, what is usually unearthed is a behaviour or habit that we've allowed to become ingrained into our personality (like a besetting sin). That behaviour is what we have substituted for going to a Holy God for true comfort. Eventually, if you go to that habit or comfort often enough, you will eventually lose your ability to say 'no' to that pattern of behaviour and you will find yourself trapped.

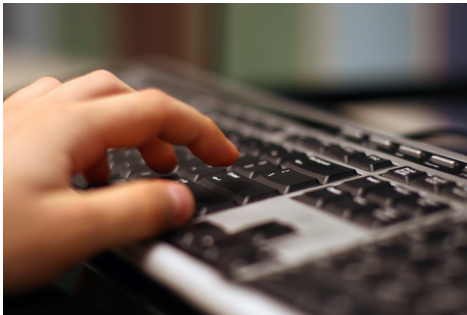
You will have been 'mastered' by it. Enslaved to it. You have become an Addict.

In Webster's dictionary it notes that the word addict comes from two latin roots, the preposition 'ad', meaning "toward," and the verb 'dicere', meaning "to speak." Join the two together and we get: addicere, which means "to speak toward," or as in Webster's definition: "to give assent, to give [oneself] up to a [a strong habit]."

In other words, if we've "given oneself up to a strong habit" we have actually 'given assent' (ie approval; sanction; agreement) to something in our lives. Another way of saying it, is we have given permission for that habit or false comfort to have a prominent place in our lives... a permission we never should have given. What we have done is elevated it above the throne of God! In other words, if we have a habit or behaviour or false comfort... a more relevant place in our life than even God... when we do that we break the 1st Commandment: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'(Exodus 20:3 NIV). In verse 5 in Exodus it adds this: "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God"

Friends, whenever I break this commandment, I am committing Idolatry... and it always gets me into a truck load of trouble!

However, the bigger concern for God isn't that we have sinned, but that we have chosen to run to a 'lesser lover' to comfort us... rather than run to the One True Lover of our Soul! That is what breaks His heart... we reject Him and settle for an act of idolatry that places us in bondage and if it gets out of hand - could eventually destroy us and those closest to us.



Think about it for a minute... whenever life goes pear-shaped or calamity and despair descends (eg a fight with your spouse/ girlfriend/boyfriend... or a relationship breakup... or a scolding from a boss... you fail at something... a rejection... a betrayal... etc), usually the first thing we run to is some form of false comfort like getting busy at work, or alcohol, or chocolate, or pornography, etc, etc.

In the past whenever I responded like that, you could hardly say I was taking my issue or my pain to God to seek His comfort... could you?

In fact, when life's pressure mounts and I willingly (rebelliously?) choose to run to 'something else', rather than run to Abba Father... I am choosing something else over and above Him. I am in fact, bowing to an idol. I am trusting in something else other than a Holy God to rescue me or take my pain away. And that is what the enemy is depending on... because that is the hook upon which he gets us addicted (Latin: "Addicere" – Webster's definition: "to give assent, to give [oneself] up to a [a strong habit].")

Every time we run to something else for comfort other than God, what we are doing is really a surrender of sorts. Any time we surrender to a false comfort of the enemy... there is usually a snare waiting to trap us. Romans 6:16 NIV states "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey..." To surrender to an ungodly habit or false comfort is to 'offer yourselves... as obedient slaves' and the result is we fall into the enemy's grip. All because we refused to receive true comfort from The Comforter. Instead, we surrendered to the enemy's ploy of false comfort.

Curiously, the same action that gets us addicted in the first place... is the same means by which we must be rescued... 'surrender'!

One path of surrender to the Father of Lies makes us 'slaves' ... the other path of surrender to Abba Father makes us 'sons'!

Take for example the person who looks for comfort in alcohol... they surrendered to the bottle, when they could have chosen what was better and surrendered to Father God by taking their pain to Him. We often don't even think of it in this way... but it is indeed idolatry every time we choose something else over and above God. Every time we choose a false comfort over The Comforter... we are choosing a sinful and damaging practice rather than a merciful, loving God who can heal.

This act of idolatry is what gives the enemy a foothold.

Every time I run back to the same habit or false comfort I am strengthening the enemy's grip over my willpower until it is no longer possible to say 'no' to alcohol, or drugs, or sex, or food, or work, or whatever the addiction is.

From a spiritual perspective, an addiction is a bit like spilling super glue. If you get to it quickly enough and wipe it up, hopefully it should clean up easily. But if you let it sit and it then hardens, you will now need special tools to remove it! The spiritual reality is much like that superglue analogy.

Take for example 2 Cor 10:4-5 NIV which is insightful in this instance: " 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"

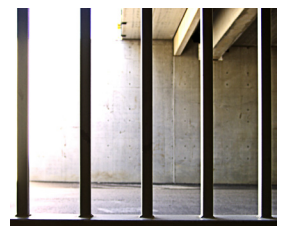
In other words, sticking with the glue analogy (pardon the pun!) let's have a closer look at that passage... Imagine that enough time has lapsed for the spilt glue to harden (in other words, if you persist with the pattern of ungodly behaviour or false comfort - you will eventually become addicted). Then of course once we realise we are in too deep, we try to stop the behaviour in our own human strength through willpower, or some special technique, usually to no avail! Why? Because we are fighting with feeble 'weapons of the world' that cannot remove the 'hardened glue'. It has become a stronghold that needs to be demolished! It also states in verse 4 that it will require 'divine power' to demolish the stronghold we have become trapped in. Sheer willpower or human techniques will not be sufficient to free you from a spiritual bondage. You will need a Deliverer (Jesus of Nazareth) to set you free using supernatural tools (ie His divine power).

I mean, what did you think was behind the habit or behaviour you have tried for so long to stop in your own strength? What else would it be if not a stronghold of the enemy? How many times have you said to yourself "I am giving this up right now!", only to find the next time you are under pressure, or you feel like a failure, or become frustrated, or feel not good enough and ashamed... what do you do? You find yourself right back in that same false comfort/behaviour again! (Which then only further increases your sense of failure and shame!).

Sound like a familiar pattern to you?

It has become a prison. Your own efforts to free yourself are futile. Only a Holy God can liberate you.

One thing I have noticed about my own struggles is that it has been my poor choices that have got me into the pit initially, but it's my pride that keeps me there! That's why addictions beckon a deeper healing than simply just stopping the behaviour.



Oh, and by the way... just being able to break the addiction is not the end goal here! Does that surprise you to hear me say that? The end goal is greater trust and intimacy with Abba Father, who is the only true source of lasting love, joy, peace and comfort.

If you are just trying to find a way to break the addiction and stop the ungodly behaviour, but have no intention of deepening your trust and intimacy with your Heavenly Father... then not only have you missed the most crucial point altogether... you will most likely also miss out on getting healed and truly set free. Breaking the addiction is not the end goal. The end goal is greater trust and intimacy with Abba Father who will then empower you to overcome the spiritual stronghold behind the addiction.

The only true antidote to addiction is the saving grace of our Holy God who alone can set us free.

However, most of us just don't trust Father God enough to let Him heal us!

Let me explore and unpack this a little further... there is a very consistent course of events that usually leads us to become addicted.

Every one of us have been hurt or wounded in childhood (whether we are in denial about that, is another topic altogether). Our unhealed wound carries with it emotional pain that we still harbour; Often the Enemy will feed us lies that are fueled by the unhealed pain of that wound (Example of Lies: "You cannot trust anyone"; "God won't come through for you"; "No one will ever love you"; "You are only loved if you perform well" etc, etc). Whatever the Lie we have bought into, when it is still empowered by the pain of the unhealed event of the past... that pain makes the Lie still feel true! So if I believe "No one will ever love me" then I will not believe God will love me either! So I cannot go to God for comfort, therefore must search for other source of comfort to make that unhealed pain go away. Sadly, we often choose to 'self-medicate' to hide this pain through various addictions already mentioned (eg alcohol, drugs, sex, food, work, etc, etc);... but rarely has it ever crossed our mind that the only One who can heal our pain, regret, anger, guilt and shame is our loving Heavenly Father who patiently waits for us to cry out to Him to rescue us from the clutches of our chosen addiction.

That's why just trying to break the addiction cannot be the end goal! Because the deeper root cause of why we got addicted in the first place has to be addressed. There is a deeper unmet emotional need that is clawing away at us on the inside. That wound is what Jesus came to restore... and once healed, that is what will overcome the addiction.

With me, from the age of 13yrs to 28yrs I was addicted to pornography and masturbation. Together they had become two powerful idols in life. When I came to Christ at 21yrs, I knew immediately in my heart this had to stop. I kept trying to overcome it. I repented hundreds of times. I swore to the Lord I would stop. But I could not. Then I started to get angry at God for not setting me free. Then I started to believe that God did not want to set me free. Then I began softening my theology to believe that my addiction was not as bad as I'd made out (when you can't find a way to get free – the only way to ease the guilt is to create a theology that supports your sinful practice). But deep down I knew that I was in bondage to a spiritual power that I could not break free from... it demanded I give it worship! So the addiction continued for many years. I was like one of Jezebel's eunuchs... completely emasculated and unable to be fruitful in any way.

Things did not begin to turn around until I began to recognize and face all of the sinful patterns I had taken on to cope in this life. I initially thought that my sexual addictions were the real issue I struggled with in life. The truth was my pride, arrogance and fear were far bigger issues! All of those traits had me wearing many masks; I lied to make myself look better to others; I was inherently fearful of being further rejected; and I would regularly manipulate others in an attempt to keep myself safe from more failure and hurt.

All of those collective behaviour patterns became the 'False Self' I had constructed in order to cope and survive in this world. I developed all of these ways of protecting myself as a means of defending and protecting myself (unconsciously of course – you never deliberately plot all this out as a child growing up... but all the while I was making sinful choices nonetheless). In my family, both my father and mother were alcoholics (so there were also generational addiction influences that needed to be addressed in my story). During the first couple of years of our dysfunctional family there were significant moments of violence and abandonment that created much fear and uncertainty in me as a little boy. When still very young my earthly dad angrily walked out on the family, leaving behind an equally angry and bitter wife and mother to raise two little boys (my brother and I). With that core wounding came a deal of emotional pain which I had no idea how



to handle... so I just pushed it all down!

Then as I grew, I unconsciously developed so many ungodly ways of coping. Yet, had convinced myself I was doing okay. I truly believed everything was normal. Then in my teenage years, when I discovered pornography and masturbation... I finally had a way of finding tangible comfort (a very 2nd rate choice compared to Father God's comfort). Nonetheless, the combination of pornography and masturbation were my chosen solace for all of that hidden pain I was carrying. But the comfort was only fleeting. I needed to keep returning regularly to the god of false comfort and the idolatry of these two combined sins in order to keep the pain at bay. It wasn't long into adolescence before I had become addicted.

Those of us who have been ensnared by some ungodly comfort or habit or practice... we all have one thing in common... every one of us have avoided surrendering to Father God to receive His holy comfort... and instead we have run to a 'lesser lover' to receive false comfort. By doing so we have surrendered to the Adversary and become enslaved. (This is what makes addiction an Idol – we choose something else over God).

So, what's the solution?



The journey to freedom for me began in finally being courageous enough to honestly answer these questions:- Why, Paul, do you keep avoiding the Father's call to come to Him for help and continue to 'give assent' to a false addictive substitute? Why do you keep running to a 'lesser lover'? Will you finally yield and surrender instead to a Holy God who loves you dearly and can set you free?

I resisted for years!

I lived in denial that deeper issues existed within me that were unhealed. I just couldn't accept that was the case. Worse yet, I continued trying to overcome my addiction in my own strength by sheer willpower. But eventually my 'mask' began to fail me. My marriage began falling apart; my own deep-seated anger began surfacing; and I was growing weary of trying to overcome an addiction that had clearly mastered me! I had finally come to the end of my own strength. Finally, I yielded. I cried to God to rescue me (part in anger, part in desperation). By now my pride had taken a battering – thankfully! I didn't really care what anyone thought of me anymore. I just wanted my marriage healed, and I was truly ready to allow God to do whatever He needed to in me.

At this point, through Ellel Ministries, I heard some teaching on the Father Heart of God and for the first time I made the connection that my own earthly dad's abandonment of me was far bigger than I'd ever acknowledged previously. I also realized how I had projected on to Father God the same disappointment and expectation that I held towards my own earthly father... deep down I believed that Father God would abandon me and not be there for me, just like my earthly father had abandoned me and was never around when I really needed him!

Finally, I moved past the denial of my wounding! It was very clear to me now that I was fearful, angry and hurting. So I began the painful journey of allowing God to pin-point all of the inner healing my heart needed. There were many tears shed over the many injustices I'd suffered. I also had to begin recognizing and confessing all the sinful ways I'd tried to survive in this life. Every one of those sinful ways of defending myself had become the 'scaffolding' I raised to protect myself. It never really worked, and they had to be gradually pulled down... one piece of 'scaffolding' at a time.

Then after all the 'deconstruction' ...Abba Father had to begin building into me, piece by piece, the realization of just how good a Dad he really was. And more importantly, how much He loved me as His son. Nothing washes away shame more completely than choosing to let your true Father lavish you with His unending love.

There was much forgiveness, inner healing and deliverance my heart needed and received. Eventually, there came a day where I just did not want to visit those 'lesser lovers' anymore! There was a moment when under pressure, I suddenly wanted to run instead into His everlasting arms to receive His perfect love and comfort rather than run back to that which was destroying me. And I have never gone back to pornography or masturbation since that day... nor have I even been close to doing it! His grace has far more power to rescue us than we realise. I can certainly resonate with what John wrote in his gospel: "When the Son sets you free you will be free indeed".

This Father that I finally surrendered to and had come to trust... had liberated me!

I'd like to share a powerful insight that Dalbey makes which I believe best summarizes our situation as to why we resist surrendering to Father God:

"The ultimate addiction is actually sin itself - the proud compulsion to control your own life and thereby avoid the truth of our broken human condition and our need for God to save us from it. When we say 'sin' we mean to 'miss the mark'; we're hooked on sinning because our innate pride doesn't allow us to hit the mark, which is, to yield to the Father."

To put it plainly, we don't trust Father God and do not want to yield or surrender to Him and his saving power of grace. We just want to be able to control our own life. We don't want to face the truth of the wounding we still carry or admit the sinful ways we have developed to hide our wounds and pain. So, deep down, we have no intention of really surrendering to God. We somehow, through our pride, we believe "if I just try harder I'll be able to stop doing this all by myself".

I wonder how that strategy is working out for you?

I can tell you that very same strategy failed miserably for me! And I kept at it for too many years!!

Dalbey offers us another gem in this statement:

"Where shame abides, addictions abound."

Wow! What a potent summary!

Wherever shame exists within a person (i.e. a wound that leads them to feel unworthy or not good enough)... that shame becomes the platform for addictions to abound within that person!

Shame actually requires a cover-up, a hiding – a darkness, in fact, that beckons the enemy.

It's therefore overcome by nakedness – by allowing our masks to be stripped away, truly surrendering to Abba Father and admitting you are wounded and have been hurt, that you have covered-up your sin and finally recognize you are powerless to overcome this addiction without Him.

Shame just exhorts you to try harder! Shame makes you believe you have to fix this situation all on your own. But Gerald May makes it clear that grace has immeasurably more power to save and change a man than shame ever will.

Shame is fueled by distrust of Father God. That's why shame can only be overcome by restored relationship with Abba Father, and not by continued striving to restore yourself through obedience. Trying harder to be righteous (ie to stop sinning) in your own strength, can never overcome shame. In fact, when you're trying to do something humanly impossible (ie overcome a spiritual bondage) you are guaranteed to fail... then your shame only increases!

My real problem was not my sexual addiction (that was the sinful 'symptom')... my real problem was the root cause of my addiction - shame. I didn't think that God could really love me, tarnished as I was, so my shame prevented me from going to God for His comfort. That left me believing there was no alternative but to settle for false comfort. Then driven by pride and fear I just pressed on, hoping I could somehow break the habit.

As a shame-filled believer, I didn't trust that Father God would love me as a son, because I had been abandoned when very young by my own earthly dad. Therefore, I believed that Father God would surely abandon me too when I most needed Him.

Shame, is therefore birthed by broken relationship Father. The only way shame is overcome is by the completed work of Jesus, who restores that relationship with Father God.

Another word for shame is disgrace. So God's antidote to shame (ie dis-grace)... is grace!



Grace is not a doctrine. It's a relationship. Grace is not what you believe, but Whom you choose to receive.

You cannot work toward grace, nor earn it. You can only humbly accept it as a gift.

So why don't we trust Father God to reveal the truth about ourselves? Because the consequences of facing the truth of why we feel ashamed, means we will also have to face a basement full of emotional pain we have suppressed for years. And we fear facing that truth about ourselves, and the pain that truth carries. Why would we withdraw from the pain of facing that truth? Because, if we're really honest we do not believe that Father God will come alongside us and heal us in that moment.

But He will.

I and many others are living proof that He does.

The enslaved addict denies that truth and indulges his pride, saying, "I will, because I can."
But a surrendered Son of God yields to the Living Truth and says, "God will, because I cannot!"

What, then, can set an addict free?...Nothing but the Blood of Jesus - which then only sets a person free to face the truth about themselves.

Granted, not everyone is ready yet to hear the truth Jesus bears.

So run for as long as you can...then when you are exhausted and have no strength left to run any further. Finally, surrender to your true Father in Heaven, who will be waiting to heal you and set you free... when you are ready.

A Prayer for you to consider praying:

Lord Jesus,

You perished on a tree to carry my shame away. Thank you for the undeserving grace you purchased for me with your blood. I accept it freely. Please forgive me for my pride that has led me to try and overcome my addictions in my own human strength. I choose to now acknowledge that I cannot set myself free. I need you, my Deliverer to liberate me. I acknowledge that I have committed idolatry by seeking false comfort in sinful ways and I have become mastered by those sinful patterns. I call this sin and I cry out for your help to begin a journey of restoration with You at my side.

I specifically name the following patterns of addictive behaviour that I have become trapped in (speak out your addictions here:.....).

In my fear and shame I have failed to completely trust You in the past, Father God. I no longer want to yield to those false comforts, instead I choose to surrender to you Lord Jesus. I choose to receive your empowering grace and begin a healing journey to restore the inner wounds that I carry that drive my addictions and sinful behaviours.

Please help me loving and merciful God to grow in my trust and intimacy of You. With each and every day that lies ahead, teach me to live a surrendered life - one day at a time. I choose from this day forward Jesus, to make you Lord over all of my future choices and decisions. I no longer want to walk as a slave to fear and shame, but rather I desire to walk as a treasured son/daughter of the Most High God.

*This I ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

(NB If you would like to pursue prayer ministry in relationship to anything shared in this article, please contact the Ellel Ministries Office during working hours on 02-4633 8102 to request an application form to attend one of our Healing Retreats) .

Paul Ryan, Centre Director
Ellel Ministries, Gilbulla

September 2016