

# Healthy Initiative Study

## Understanding Yourself: Body, Mind & Spirit

### 1.2: The Paradoxes of Addiction

#### Chapter 1 - DESIRE: Addiction and Human Freedom

Offered by Healthy Initiative Ministries - Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. - [medicalmobilizers.org/healthy-initiative-studies](http://medicalmobilizers.org/healthy-initiative-studies)

**Resource:** Addiction and Grace by Dr. Gerald G. May. Published by Harper & Row, 1988. Dr. May was trained as a physician specializing in psychiatry. He wrote this book while doing an exploration of spirituality and the human brain when working for the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C. His key topics are: Desire, Experience, Mind, Body, Spirit, Grace, Empowerment and Homecoming.

#### The Paradoxes of Addiction

**1. May:** *"For generations, psychologists thought that virtually all self-defeating behavior was caused by repression. I have now come to believe that addiction is a separate and even more self-defeating force that abuses our freedom, and makes us do things we really do not want to do. While repression stifles desire, addiction attaches desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things, or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives."* **Discussion:** Review the process of how repression stifles desire but addiction attaches or "nails" desire. Discuss how it is more difficult to deal with the objects of attachment that become preoccupations and obsessions that rule our lives and takes away our freedom.

**2. May:** *"In this light, we can see why traditional psychotherapy, which is based on the release of repression, has proven ineffective with addictions."* **Discussion:** Discuss why Dr. May says that this also *"shows why addiction is the most powerful psychic enemy of humanity's desire for God."*

**3. May:** *"I mean in all truth that the psychological, neurological, and spiritual dynamics of full-fledged addiction are actively at work with every human being". And, "The same processes that are responsible for addiction to alcohol and narcotics are also responsible for addiction to ideas, work, relationships, power, moods, fantasies and an endless array of other things".*

**Discussion:** Dr. May is saying that we all are addicts in a general sense and that the potential to become a true addict is present in our psychological, neurological and spiritual natures. Regardless of the object of attachment – even good things such as physical exercise, it seems likely that a person with the tendency to be addictive with alcohol or chemicals might be with other things. Why?

**4. Summary:** Addictions are our worst enemies as they can enslave us and destroy our self control and our freedom. They can make us idolaters as we start worshipping the objects of attachment preventing us from freely loving God and one another. They keep us from obeying the two great commandments. The paradox is that addiction is both an inherent part of our nature and an antagonist of all nature. **May** says, *"Our addiction is the absolute enemy of human freedom, the antipathy of love. Yet in still another paradox, our addictions can lead us to a deep appreciation of grace"*. This happens when we fall on our knees begging God for help. **Discussion:** Share how Dr. May captures the truth about how addictions can affect your life and how one's faith in God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as the Provider of Grace is the only hope for the addict. (Reminder: you cannot manipulate the Grace of God nor the God of Grace).

**5. Summary:** After describing the questions about addictions (the nature of it; real help against it; and his own struggles with addictions). **May:** *"Understanding will not deliver us from addictions, but it will, I hope, help us appreciate grace. Grace is the most powerful force in the universe. It can transcend repression, addiction and every other internal or external power that seeks to oppress the freedom of the human heart. Grace is where our hope lies."* **Discussion:** Have you personally found that Grace is your only hope? Only at certain times or all of the time? Be sure that everyone you encourage or counsel leaves your discussion or session with some sense of hope to keep taking steps forward or at least not backward. Discuss how standing still is ok at times.