

Healthy Initiative Study

Understanding Yourself: Body, Mind & Spirit

1.3: Journey Toward Understanding

Chapter 1 - DESIRE: Addiction and Human Freedom

Offered by Healthy Initiative Ministries - Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. - 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.

Summary of Dr. May's Journey: Dr. May started working with addicted people at the time he was wondering about addiction and grace along with his own addictedness and his own spiritual hunger. He had worked hard to repress the love of God and his love for God after his father died when he was nine years old. He could pray later in life since he had learned early that God was a friend. His memories of both his father and of God faded in his memory so he spent years in college and later studying science in medical school seeking to go it alone without God since he didn't get much help with the pain of the loss of his father. He made a god out of science as many do. He saw prayer and religiosity in others as signs of weakness. After serving in the Vietnam War, he learned how to repress those bad experiences. But that seemed to wake him up some as well especially when he chose to work in a drug abuse clinic. Since he was addicted to professional success, he became depressed when none of his training and psychiatry methods worked for his patients who would be helped with emotional and social problems but still remained addicted to narcotics. He shared how he was introduced to a faith healer who boldly told him that she sensed he too was a healer upon shaking hands but that she wouldn't take her sick dog to him because he thought he had to be the one to do the healing. That got his attention as he knew he had been the one trying to command the process of healing in his addiction to professional success.

He learned that the only thing that had helped some of the addicts was some kind spiritual experience. Secretly, he first wanted to learn how to stimulate a spiritual experience so that that could become part of his therapy and professional success. But he also realized that he wanted to enjoy some spiritual experience again himself. He proceeded to do his research and consulted with some clergy friends. Those who thought they had answers were the least of help while those who denied knowing of any explanation simply said it was spiritual and volunteered to help explore the subject. He then experimented with many religions and practices and even found that the AA movement offered the most help.

He started practicing yoga and saw it as the opposite of repression. One of his new open-minded thoughts was the prayer he had as a nine year-old which was "Dear Jesus, help me." Though embarrassed, he ran with this new thought and process. His desire for God grew. Then he realized that his research project had become his own personal spiritual journey. He realized too that he needed as much of God's grace as any of his patients. His desire and love for God grew even more. He did some studies on of how patients become addicted to chemicals that were not supposed to be addictive such as painkillers, aspirin, nose drops, depressants and tranquilizers. His discovery was that any substance that could alter your mind even as a perceived change can become addictive. He started to realize that he too was dependent or possibly even addicted to nicotine, caffeine, sugar and chocolate. The physical reactions to the absence of these substances caused him distress with physical tension somewhat similar but much milder physiologically to those of his patients using strong narcotics or alcohol.

Then he learned that addiction was not limited to substances. He learned that he was addicted to work performance, responsibility, intimacy, being liked, helping others, etc. These he called compulsions. His work depression would happen if he couldn't get his fix of professional success as a psychiatrist. There was no relief similar to worse addictions. All of his new awareness was what finally brought him personally to his knees seeking the grace of God asking for forgiveness for seeking to be his own god. He returned again to his child-like faith. He said that though minor in comparison to alcoholics or worse, his experience had the same grace-full effect. The means of grace drove him to a spiritual oneness with God – a renewal or revival in his faith. He had to admit that he never learned how to make spiritual experiences happen to chemically addicted people which would have been great for his business - his practice of psychiatry. He did become more humble by realizing his limitation as a physician. He said he learned that "all people are addicts" using the broader definition and that "to be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace". **Discussion:** What is the most interesting part of Dr. May's journey toward understanding God's Grace? Towards freedom? Reflect on your own journey (story). Lastly, discuss the relationship between addiction and grace.

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