

Healthy Initiative Study

Understanding Yourself: Body, Mind & Spirit

1.5: Addiction and Freedom; Attachment & Displacement

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.

Addiction and Freedom

1. **Summary:** Scripture affirms that God created us out of a perfect love (1 John 4:7-21). Our deepest desires draw us towards this love which offers us a free will with free choices. **May:** *"Spiritually, our freedom allows us to choose as we wish for or against God, life, and love. The love that creates us may be haunting, but it is not enslaving; it is eternally present, yet endlessly open".*

Discussion: Discuss how God's perfect love offers us freedom and how manipulation and unhealthy control destroys freedom.

2. **Summary:** Our free will has a purpose that we may choose freely to love God and one another without coercion or manipulation.

May: *"This is the deepest desire of our hearts".* **Question:** What is the purpose of having a free will? What is the alternative?

3. **May:** *"But our freedom is not complete. Working against it is the powerful force of addiction. Psychologically, addiction uses up desires.... Addiction sucks our life energy into specific obsessions and compulsions. Spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The objects of our addictions become our false gods. Addiction then displaces and supplants God's love as the source and object of our deepest true desire".* **Discussion:** Based on Dr. May's assessments, how does addiction work against our freedom?

Attachment and Displacement

1. **May:** *"Addiction exists wherever persons are internally compelled to give energy to things that are not their true desires. To define it directly, addiction is a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person's will and desire. Addiction sidetracks and eclipses the energy of our deepest, truest desire for love and goodness. We succumb because the energy of our desire becomes attached or nailed to specific behaviors, objects, or people. Attachment, then, is the process that enslaves desire and creates the state of addiction".* **Question:** How would you describe the interactions between one's true desires and our energy, attachment, behavior, objects, or people? How does attachment enslave desires and create a state of addiction?"

2. **May:** *"Detachment is the word used in spiritual traditions to describe freedom of desire. Not freedom from desire, but freedom of desire. Of all the concepts we will be discussing, detachment is the most widely misunderstood." (It is not detachment that devalues desire and denies the potential goodness of the things and people to which one can become attached.)"it aims at correcting one's own anxious grasping in order to free oneself for a committed relationship to God" (and people).*

Discussion: How does a correct understanding of detachment enkindle the heart, awaken the spirit, simulate our longings, and show us where and who God is?

3. **May:** *"Detachment involves our basic desire for God and sets it free. With freedom of desire comes the capacity to love and love is the goal of the spiritual life".* (Think of the two greatest commandments to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your mind and your soul and then to love your neighbor as yourself). Also, "Jesus many words about detachment are set in the context of growing fullness of love." **Discussion:** Read John 17 (Jesus' high priestly prayer) and relate it to the concept of detachment

4. **Summary:** Dr. May says that detachment is the opposite process of attachment which enslaves a person's will and desire leading to addiction. What detachment does is offer liberation of desire; an enhancement of passion; the freedom to love with all one's being. Only then, it seems, can we bear the pain such love can bring. That means love to and from God and others. It allows us to take a risk to accept God's love and forgiveness without obligation. **May:** *"The state that liberation leads to might legitimately be called a condition of nonattachment. I, however, prefer to call it freedom."* **Discussion:** How does freedom to feel God's love help with the pain that loving someone might bring such as rejection or abuse? Isn't it easier to love another person when we know that God loves us unconditionally? If attachment brings addiction down, doesn't it make sense that detachment is necessary to gain freedom? Relate this to forgiveness. Isn't it easier to forgive others when you personally know and experience God's forgiveness?