

Healthy Initiative Study

Understanding Yourself: Body, Mind & Spirit

1.1: Preface & Introduction & Repression

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.

Preface:

1. May: *"I live a life infused by the bondage of addiction and the hope of grace; I think we all live such lives. My hope is that you who read these words will be touched lovingly by the True Word, that there will be enough space within my words for grace to flow for you."* **Question:** How would you describe this tension between bondage and hope? Between addiction and grace? Describe what it is like to be touched by the True Word (Christ Jesus)?

2. May: *"The primary Scriptural themes for this text are the Eden story (Genesis 1:27-3:24), the exodus experience (Exodus 1-15), and Paul's beautiful portrayal of sin, deliverance, and the life of the Spirit in the letter of Romans (5:12-8:39)."* **Discussion:** Dr. May encourages us to review these passages. (See lesson 1:4 – Genesis)

3. May: *"Vignettes concerning people in this text are composites based on real people's experiences."* **Point:** It is important to note that Dr. May's illustrations and stories were not fictional but experiences of real people / patients using different names.

4. May: *"My deepest human indebtedness in this work is to those chemically addicted and their families who have allowed me to share some of their experiences. They taught me that major addiction is the sacred disease of our time." "Let us pray that our communal efforts will contribute to that primal, eternal desire that we all share with God: perfect freedom & love for all.."*

Introduction to Chapter 1 – Desire

1. May: *"After twenty years of listening to the yearnings of people's hearts, I am convinced that all human beings have an inborn desire for God".* **Discussion:** Discuss how this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure (i.e., heart). Some sense it is a longing for wholeness, completion or fulfillment. It is a longing for love – a hunger to love and be loved, and to move closer to the Source of love (God). This is the essence of the human spirit; the origin of our highest hopes and most noble dreams.

2. May: *"In an outpouring of love, God creates us and plants the seeds of this God-given desire for love for Him within us".*

Discussion: How is this desire for love nourished throughout our lives? If our longing for true love is the treasure of our hearts, how might this help us live up to the two great commandments (to love God and your neighbor as yourself)?

3. May: *"But something gets in the way. Not only are we unable to fulfill the commandments, we often ignore our desire to do so. The longing disappears from our awareness – its energy is usurped by forces that are not living."* **Discuss:** Discuss Romans 7:14-24.

4. May: *"Theologically, sin is what turns us away from love for others, self and God. When I look at this problem psychologically, I see two forces that are responsible: repression and addiction. We all suffer from both".* **Discussion:** How are these different?

Repression

1. May: *"We frequently repress our desire for love because love makes us vulnerable to being hurt".* Summary: The Latin word for passion means "suffered". Love can bring us joy but can also make us suffer. We repress our longings when they hurt us too much.

Discussion: Repressing our desire for love is a normal human response. Discuss if and how and why we do the same with God.

2. Summary – We repress a desire and keep it out of our awareness. We focus on safer things. Psychology calls this displacement. Repressed desires don't go away. **May:** *"Repression, then, in spite of its sinister reputation, is relatively flexible. It is workable. Addiction, the other force that turns us away from love, is much more vicious".* **Discussion:** Express in your own words how both repression and addiction turn us away from love. Share examples of the vicious nature of addiction.

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