

Healthy Initiative Study

Understanding Yourself: Body, Mind & Spirit

1.7: Hope

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.

Hope

1. **Summary:** The bad news is that we are dependent upon Grace for liberation from our desires but our addictions impair our receptivity to Grace. Dr. May calls that a predicament. So what are we to do? The good news is that our addictions can never completely vanquish our freedom. **May:** *"Addictions may oppress our desires, erode our wills, confound our motivations, and contaminate our judgment, but its bondage is never absolute."* **Discussion:** How is it possible to grasp at some kind of hope at all times? How can we know for sure that there's always a good choice we can make?

2. *May: "Because of God's continuing love, the human spirit can never be completely obliterated."*

Summary: There seems to always be some small capacity for choice - even against extreme social oppression. Gandhi calls this "soul force". Martin Luther King spoke of the strength of the moral nature to always reach out for what ought to be possible. Some victims of the Holocaust did not give up day after day. **May:** *"The bare edge of freedom is insured and preserved inside us by God, and no matter what forces oppress us from without or within, it is indestructible"*.

Question: Have you ever lost hope? How did that feel? Have you had panic attacks making you feel hopeless and out of control? Or do you know of others who have done so? How can we help someone in that state? Don't we all usually keep fighting for hope until the last breath? Counselors are trained to always give people some sense of hope at the end of each discussion or session.

3. Dr. May says that because we have our eternal possibility for freedom, we are not helpless as we face our own internal addictions or eternal oppression. **May:** *"Although we cannot rid ourselves of attachment through our own autonomous efforts, and our addictions can indeed deaden our responsiveness to grace, there is always some level at which we can choose freely, to turn to God or turn away from God, to seek grace or avoid it, to be willing for our attachments to be lightened or to hold on to them"*.

Discussion: What might be the factors that drive people to God or away from God? To attachments or away from attachments? Toward grace or away from grace?

4. Hope is simple. Humiliation means admitting defeat that we cannot master our own destinations. We sin out of a desire to be god instead of depending on God. We quickly fall into a spirit of pride. It may not be so great that all things in our lives are going great. **May:** *"It is precisely our most powerful addictions that cause us to defeat ourselves, that bring us to the rock bottom realization that we cannot finally master everything. Thus, although in one sense addiction is the enemy of grace, it can also be a powerful channel for the flow of grace. Addiction can be, and often is, the thing that brings us to our knees."*

Discussion: Read and discuss the problem of addiction found in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

5. The Apostle Paul came to see his affliction (or maybe his addiction) as a kind of gift. Temptations can lead to one one's salvation. Addiction will prove to us that we are not gods. We can become our own worst enemy when we don't think there is hope in anything including God. But we can actually get to the place where we know that there is hope and nothing but God.

May: *"It is possible that we will turn to God with a true sense of who we are, with an integrity that is both humble and confident, with a dignity that knows itself because it has met its limits."*

Discussion: How does this perspective affect how we deal with affliction or even addiction? Or temptations? Are we thankful for the gift of addiction, so that we too may drop on our knees at the cross of Jesus Christ? It's similar to being thankful for pain and not calling it the "problem of pain" but instead calling it a "blessing a pain". As we know, the feeling of pain will keep us from doing more harm to ourselves.

6. **May:** *"Like freedom, hope is a child of grace", and "grace cannot be stopped. I will refer once more to the Saint Paul, a man who I am convinced understood addiction."* The Apostle Paul said, "Hope will not be denied because of God's love has been poured out into our hearts" (Romans 5:5). **Discussion:** How would you now explain the relationship between addiction and grace? Paint a picture of hope using the key dynamic concepts of: the desire is be loved by God and then to love our neighbors freely; attachment and detachment, freedom, grace, and hope.

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