

ADDICTION: OUR DECISIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Reading some of our older son's blogs on addiction and spirituality led me to reread portions of Gerald G. May's book about both topics. His book was entitled, [Addiction and Grace—Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions](#). Gerald May M.D. was a psychiatrist who was also at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. He was a Senior Fellow in Contemplative Theology and Psychology" there. His book builds a very strong case for realizing that addiction to anything (he provides a list of over 150 addictive experiences) affects all of who we are—not just our bodies, minds or our relationships.

Dr. May reminds us that addiction has a very profound impact on our spiritual journeys as well. There are few, if any of us, who are so close to God that we can claim that we are addicted to nothing. It might be an over the counter medication or a prescribed medication. It could just as well be being popular, stress, winning, being in charge, making money, chocolate or always being on time, etc.

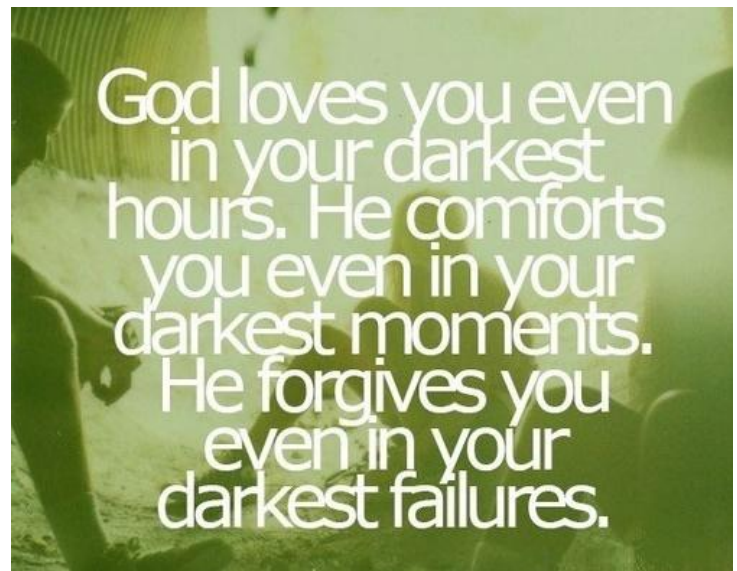
When I was a child, and until the day he died, my dad was an active alcoholic person. I add the word "person" because he did not surrender his personhood just because he was overtaken by what I suspect were the numbing effects of alcohol. Of course, he did not find it easy to let go of the alcohol. Addiction is a soul wound as severe as trauma, physical and emotional abandonment or being denied the basic respect to which we are all entitled.

Along with addictions that I might not be aware of, I am very aware that I am addicted to being a workaholic. The effects of that addiction, while pleasing to my employers, including The United Methodist Church, were much less pleasing to my family. I am reminded of this whenever we look at the lives of our children. They probably all work in excess of 65 and perhaps even 75 hours a week.

It is important to point out that addiction is not the same thing as dependency. I am utterly dependent on the medications (18 pills each day) that I take to limit some of the effects Parkinson's Disease. Life for me would be unthinkable without them. What makes addiction different from my dependency? Addiction takes away our freedom to make healthy choices. It can also cause us to make choices that can destroy our health, our family life and even our own life. It basically puts whatever we are addicted to in first place in our lives.

Why we get addicted to alcohol, street drugs, prescribed medications, violence, speeding, sex or spending more than we can afford is the subject of countless books. For now I want to limit our focus on how the Christian Churches, in my experience, respond to addiction in their midst. Some are eager to develop supportive ministry with people who are struggling and even losing the fight with addictions.

Other responses include the following:



1. We look at addiction as a sign of weak or nonexistent faith in God. We may assume that an addicted person does not actively seek God's grace.
2. We may condemn the addicted person as a sinner. This keeps them at a distance spiritually and physically. We fear the effects of welcoming addicted people into our congregations.
3. We may prefer to believe that Jesus called us to less stressful ministry than genuinely welcoming and being supportive of people burdened with addiction.
4. Sometimes we turn against people who are addicted. Perhaps they seem to ask "too much" of us while unconsciously we are judging them as "unworthy".
5. Some of us prefer to think that God made two kinds of people: a) those who are born as "bad" people and b) the rest of us who prefer to think of ourselves as the "good" people. Wrong! God made us all good in our inner essence (our being-ness) as humans.
6. We judge people who are addicted. We forget that Jesus told us to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute for you." ([Matthew 5:44](#)) My sense is that Jesus included those who make us uncomfortable by their lifestyle—including people who are addicted!
7. When you have time, look up hymn # 357 in The United Methodist Hymnal (1989). Read the words of each of the six verses of "[Just As I Am, Without One Plea.](#)" Look for any signs that God refuses to love every person. You won't find any. Choosing God's way is the best way to show others of how inclusive God's love is. However, we don't always agree with God!
8. Whether we are addicts seeking help from a church or we are among those who want to exclude addicted people from the church's ministries, we share a common need. We really need to come to a complete stop every day to pray for God's grace to show us how to love our neighbors as ourselves.
9. Finally, I'm certain that God wants us to love all of the people whom God created irrespective of where they (or we) originated and in whatever condition they (or we) arrive in our churches. Prayer, Bible study, meditation and even limited fasting (after seeking medical advice) are a start in preparing for ministry to anyone who wants to be free of the addiction.

As always there is more to say, and I invite you to be among those who say it.

Rev. Larry LaPierre