



A Measure of Grace

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Bob's Brain *By Roger Jones*

I was recently thinking that it would be interesting to know more about how addiction affects the physical nature of the brain. I've heard from a number of sources that addiction does in fact restructure the very fabric of the brain. To understand why or how, I did a bit of research, primarily using *Addiction and Grace* by Gerald May. In it May discusses how addiction impacts us in mind, body, and spirit. For my purposes, I focused on the "body" section of the text.

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To understand how addiction impacts the brain, it is first helpful to understand a bit about how the brain is structured and how it functions. There are billions, possibly trillions of cells inside the brain, which send information to and receive it from one another. Various chemicals are released based upon the information being transferred. Our bodies are constantly working to maintain a sense of

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Bob's Brain	1
Purity Prayer	3
Reflections	4
Oct at a Glance	8
Nov and Beyond	8

(Bob's Brain continued from page 1)

balance and "normality." Normality is determined by what our bodies are used to experiencing. When things are "normal," Cell A is sending a steady, regular amount of information to Cell B. Cell B is happy because things are regular and ordinary.

As an example of how addiction affects the brain, let's talk about "Bob." Bob is living a pretty ordinary life. He is happily married and things are going well. There are ups and downs, of course, but all in all, Bob is content. All those many cells inside Bob's brain are sending and receiving information at a steady, manageable pace. Cell A and Cell B are "happy."

One day at work, Bob's boss gives him a poor performance evaluation. Bob feels misunderstood and upset. In the part of Bob's brain that deals with work stress, Cell A and Cell B communicate a bit more information than usual, but nothing terribly extreme. He leaves work at the end of the day, as usual, and heads for home. Typically, Bob gets home an hour before his wife. He often spends this time watching the news on TV or going through the mail. But today, he is still upset when he gets home, and the usual things won't distract him. Cell A won't shut up! So he sits down in front of the computer to divert himself with email.

As his email comes up, he notices an ad for a beach vacation. There's a happy couple in their swimwear laughing on the beach. The woman is particularly beautiful in her swimming suit. Bob isn't as upset now; he's found a momentary distraction. Cell A begins to send pleasant chemicals to Cell B. Bob clicks on the ad. Hmmm, he thinks. Where's the swimming-suit lady? She's not there anymore. Thus begins a search to continue the distraction from the negative feelings Bob has been carrying for most of the day.

Eventually Bob's search leads him to a website where the women are topless. His body is responding now with arousal. Cell A is sending more and more information to Cell B. Cell B is overwhelmed and begins to send a "slow down" message back to Cell A. But Bob isn't ready to stop the rush of feelings inside of him. He continues to look. Cell A continues to send the stimulating chemicals. Cell B is reaching critical mass and can do one of two things at this point -- completely shut down and destroy itself, or adapt to the new level of information. Just as this critical point in Cell B's life approaches, Bob hears the car door slam. His wife is home, so he stops his search and greets her at the door. They talk and things return to normal.

After only one time, Bob's brain is not addicted to porn. But, the next

(Continued on page 6)

Prayer for Sexual Purity

By Mary Heathman

[WGA Founding Director, Mary Heathman, participated a few years ago in a National Day of Prayer Event. The focus was on the scripture, "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, turn from their wicked ways, and pray, I will hear their prayers and heal their land." This is the prayer she offered.]

When we lift our hearts to you, Lord, we are filled with awe. As the prophet Isaiah has said, "I see the Lord, seated on the throne, exalted; and the train of his robe, fills the temple with glory; and the whole earth is filled with His glory."

By contrast, Lord, our society has sexuality seated on the throne and exalts that which is unholy and impure in your eyes. And nothing humbles us more, Lord, than the statistics that say we, who are called by your name, have settled for less than your standards ---- in the same ways as our society we involve ourselves in the use of pornography, and homosexual and heterosexual alike, we par-

ticipate in sexual impurities of all kinds.

We repent, Lord, on behalf of the Body of Christ. Forgive us and create in your Church people with new and clean hearts, filled with clean thoughts and right desires. Restore to us the joy of your salvation; restore us to innocence in the ways of the enemy. Purge and redeem your people from sexual sin.

And for our society, we lay before you our fear and confusion. Give us vision for healthy sexuality that we might pray for our land in wisdom and truth. Expose the strategies of the enemy and give us strength to fight the Lamb's war on behalf of our cities, state, and country.

And in all these things, we pray, keep us close to your heart that we might see what you see, feel what you feel, and do what you do.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.
✠

Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Parenthetical Grace

I have met regularly in a Renovare* spiritual formation small group for the past 6 years. Much like WGA provides small groups to work on sexual and relational issues, our Renovare group focuses intentionally on nurturing spiritual health through spiritual disciplines. The word “disciplines” can stir up visions of legalistic flagellation, but there is careful attention to emphasize God’s grace in what we do.

Each week we read through the following six commitments together:

- By God's grace, I will set aside time regularly for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading and will seek to practice the presence of God.
- By God's grace, I will strive mightily against sin and will do deeds of love and mercy.
- By God's grace, I will welcome the Holy Spirit, exercising the gifts and nurturing the fruit while living in the joy and power of the Spirit.

- By God's grace, I will endeavor to serve others everywhere I can and will work for justice in all human relationships and social structures.

- By God's grace, I will share my faith with others as God leads and study the Scriptures regularly. By God's grace, I will joyfully seek to show forth the presence of God in all that I say, in all that I do, in all that I am. ⁽¹⁾

I could probably stop writing here because these six commitments provide amazing content for almost unending meditation and examination all by themselves! But of course, I have a few thoughts about them. J

After spending the first three years in this group feeling guilty every two weeks that I had “failed” in almost every commitment I had made, I noticed the phrase “by God’s grace” at the beginning of every single spiritual endeavor. Aha! I breathed a sigh of relief as I realized that it is only by God’s grace that I can have any spiritual discipline. So my focus turned to asking for His

(Continued on page 5)

(Reflections continued from page 4)

grace instead of berating myself for my failures. Not surprisingly, many of these disciplines are starting to peak through more regularly of their own accord and with much joy.

After three more years of repeating these same six confessions every other week (it obviously takes awhile for good things to soak into my head!), I noticed the that fifth confession not only began with “by God’s grace” but also incorporated “as God leads.” I was suddenly struck with the bookends of God’s grace in my life. I cannot build any lasting spiritual discipline in my life without His grace and I cannot move forward effectively without His leading.

My life is encased in the parenthesis of God’s grace.
He moves behind and before me (Psalm 138:5).
His grace is where I rest; His leading is where I move.
His yoke is easy; His burden is light (Matthew 11:29).

Could it really be this straightforward? Jesus speaks to my legalistic soul -- a laboring soul that sincerely desires true spiritual life -- when He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened

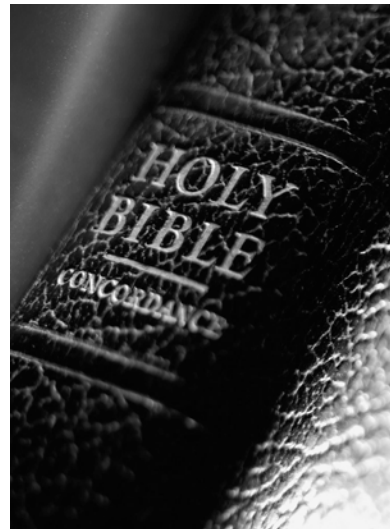
and I will give you rest.”² “My grace is sufficient for you!”³

*For more information about Renovare and spiritual formation groups, you can visit their website: www.renovare.org/

¹ *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* by James Bryan Smith, Harper-SanFrancisco, 1999. p. 100.

² Matthew 11:28.

³ II Cor. 12:9.

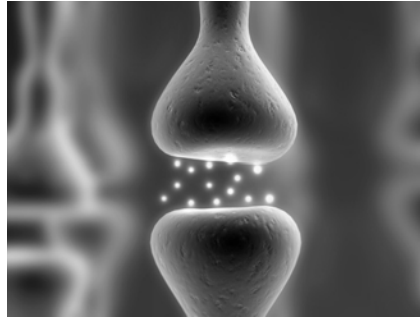


(Bob's Brain *continued from page 2*)

time Bob has a bad day, he remembers the thing that made him feel better. He returns to the computer. This happens again and again. At this point, Cell B has finally begun to adapt to the new flow of information. In fact, Cell B has grown to *need* the flow of information. It has expanded its number of "receivers" so that it can catch any stray stimulating chemicals that Bob may produce throughout the day when he sees a beautiful woman at the office or on the street. Bob's body has created a new "normal," one that includes a regular dose of the chemicals generated by viewing pornography. Bob doesn't have bad days often, so he is looking at porn maybe once a month or so.

One Sunday, he is feeling particularly good. His football team just won a big game, and he and his friends go out to celebrate. He gets home at about 8:00 that night very relaxed. Part of Bob's Sunday night ritual is to look at his schedule for the next week. He remembers the big meeting on Wednesday and how much work he has to do. There is plenty of time to prepare tomorrow, but now he can't stop thinking about it. He wants to continue to feel good. He could re-watch the game highlights, or spend some time with his wife, or he could... And then he remembers how good porn makes him feel.

Now Bob is using porn in two ways. When he feels bad and wants to feel



better, and when he feels good and wants to continue to feel good. The more Bob turns to porn to maintain his good feelings, the more the cells in his brain are impacted and adapting to the chemicals that porn generates in his body.

Eventually, Bob realizes he has a problem. He has a moment of clarity when he realizes what he is doing. Before, he only viewed porn after a bad day at work. But now, he's looking at porn pretty much anytime. A fight with the wife, an unexpected expense, or a stressful visit with family make him want to feel better. He wants to keep the "good times rolling" when he's in a good mood. Sometimes he even wants to look at porn after he's just had sex with his wife. His appetite seems insatiable. He's troubled by this realization.

Bob attempts to stop looking at porn, with varying success. He makes it a week without it, which is quite a big deal since he's been doing it every

(Continued on page 7)

(Bob's Brain *continued from page 6*)

day for a while now. But after the first week, he goes back to the porn with a vengeance. He's been spending about a half an hour per day on the computer. This time, he goes into his office after his wife is in bed and doesn't stop until he sees the sun start to rise.

Little does Bob know, the very cells within his brain are working against his efforts to stop. All the billions of Cell B's in his brain are now expecting a steady flow of porn induced, good feeling chemicals. Trying to stop his behavior brings his body discomfort. He has a headache and he is irritable. These symptoms in his body make his life more stressful – less productive at work, more fights with his wife. And these are the very things that made Bob turn to porn in the first place. Bob is in the fight of his life... to regain control of his body and to create a new, healthy "normal" for himself free from pornography.

I've used Bob and pornography as an example, but this story could just as easily have been about Sue and an emotionally dependant relationship. Pretty much anything can be the trigger...food, sex, drugs, alcohol, or a relationship. We use these things to make ourselves feel better, and we

become attached to them and then addicted.

It is important to remember that when we or someone we love is leaving an addiction behind, there is more at stake than emotions. The longer a person is trapped in addictive behavior, the longer it will likely take to restore the brain to a healthy, balanced place which is free from the need for unhealthy stimuli. Understanding this can help us to pray more

specifically for God to heal our bodies and minds from the damage we have inflicted on ourselves through addictive behaviors.

Lord, I confess to you the ways that I have used unhealthy things to make myself feel better. Please give me the strength to say no to things that lead me away from dependence upon You. Please heal

my body and specifically, my brain. Help me to wait out the difficult times, while my brain adjusts to a new "normal." Please restore all my Cell A's and Cell B's to your intent for them. Amen.

The longer a person is trapped in addictive behavior, the longer it will likely take to restore the brain to a healthy, balanced place which is free from the need for unhealthy stimuli



October At a Glance

October 12: WGA participated in missions event at Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church

October 17–19th: WGA Leadership Retreat

October 25th: WGA participated at Love Won Out, sponsored by Focus on the Family

October 26th: WGA presented at First Denver Friends Church

October 29: WGA presented at Galilee Baptist Church

November And Beyond

November 8th: Roger Jones will be speaking at a training for HIV CareLink

November 17th: WGA presenting at a college group at First Presbyterian Church in Boulder

November 27-28th: WGA offices will be closed for Thanksgiving Holiday

December 13: Intercessory Prayer, 7:00–9:00 am at the WGA offices

April 24-26th: WGA Family and Friends Retreat

Thursday Night Group

October 2nd: 35
October 9th: 35
October 16th: 36
October 23rd: 35
October 30th: 39

Orientation meeting: 2

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A Measure of Grace
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Where Grace Abounds
exists to guide and support
men and women who seek to
understand sexuality and
relationship, and to inspire
all people to know and
personally appropriate
God's plan for their
sexuality and relationships.

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