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# A Measure of Grace

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## What is Addiction? How Do I Know if I Have a Problem?

*by Roger Jones*

This past fall, WGA ran a pilot group focused on addiction. The test run went well and, with a few changes made to the curriculum, we ran a three month focus group in March, April and May. Another three month cycle of the group is scheduled to begin in the fall of this year, so please let us know if you are interested in learning more about it. We plan to work this group into our regular rotation of services and groups. While WGA primarily focuses on sexual and relationship issues, other types of addictions can be addressed in the group as well.

There are a few prerequisites for participating, so if you are interested, please do let us know soon.

When considering any topic, it is helpful to define the terms being used. In a talk I present in WGA's Foundations Series called "Understanding Addiction," I offer a few definitions. From *Webster's Dictionary*, "Addiction

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is the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma.” In his book *Addiction and Grace*, Gerald May states that “addiction attaches desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives.” And then, I add my own piece to defining addiction by saying, “Addiction is a pattern of destructive behavior that is so ingrained it feels normal.”

A commonly asked question is, “How do I know if something is an addiction?” This is an important question. We often “deny” the severity of a problem we are facing. And it is helpful to remember that not everything we struggle with is an addiction. There are three things to consider when making such an assessment:

- 1) *There have been repeated (and failed) attempts to stop the behavior.* This seems to be the most straightforward point to consider when asking if something has become an addiction. But again, our ability to live in

denial never ceases to amaze. For years, I convinced myself that my struggle with pornography was just a phase I was going through and that I could stop anytime I wanted. When I tried to stop (and failed), I always had an excuse. I didn’t really want to stop badly enough. Or I had too many other things going on, and I couldn’t devote the time I wanted to make better choices. My excuses did eventually run out, and I had to face the music. I was trapped in a cycle of addiction

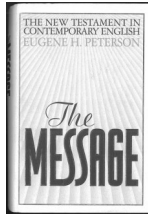
and unable to stop my behavior on my own.

2) *There has been an escalation in the frequency and/or intensity of the behavior.* When we are unable to stop a behavior, it also usually escalates. Unfortunately with addiction, we tend to want more of our “fix,” rather than less, and we want it more often. My usage of pornography began

as an every now and then occurrence but, over time, there was a clear increase in frequency. Eventually, it became almost daily. Along with the increase of frequency was an increase in intensity as well. In the beginning, it was enough to see scantily clad people in suggestive situations. But that did not last. Later, the people needed to be naked; then

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***For years, I convinced myself that my struggle with pornography was just a phase I was going through and that I could stop anytime I wanted.***



## Helping One Another Heal Scriptural Admonitions

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*Note: Scriptural references have been compiled by Mary Heathman and are all taken from The Message, a modern idiomatic translation of the Bible by Eugene Peterson.*

Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. . . . Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Ro 12:9-10

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody. Ro 12:14-16

Forget about deciding what's right for each other. Here's what you need to be concerned about: that you don't get in the way of someone else, making life more difficult than it already is. I'm convinced—Jesus convinced me!—that everything as it is in itself is holy. We, of course, by the way we treat it or talk about it, can contaminate it. Ro 14:13-14

So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it! Ro 15:7

Personally, I've been completely satisfied with who you are and what you

are doing. You seem to me to be well-motivated and well-instructed, quite capable of guiding and advising one another. Ro 15:14

It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows. Ga 5:13

I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. Eph 4:2-3, 32

Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Col 3:13, 16a

So speak encouraging words to one

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## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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### **Mothering the New Man**

For years I hated my body. I was brutally bulimic: exercising to the point of structural damage, bingeing and purging, taking laxatives. I could not separate the internal isolation I felt in the world from my exterior, physical being. I had determined that I could not be loved because my body was unacceptable. This combined with the subtle Gnostic influences (to hate all flesh) in my Christian training, created a potent cocktail of self-loathing.

Fast forward through getting married to an amazing man, having children, seeing some great counselors, having long talks with good friends, and the general, overall continual soaking of God's healing Spirit, and I find myself with a completely different attitude towards my body.

This amazing vehicle has hummed away doing its magical oxygenating-growing-cleansing-sensing thing day and night for 50 years. Of all of the billions of things that could go wrong with this incomprehensibly complex organism, few have. It has carried me (both literally and figuratively) up every mountain and through every valley of my life. The wrinkles around my eyes bear testimony to lots of laughter and time in the warm sun. The soft cushion around my middle that blunts my sexy curves is one of my grand-

son's favorite places to rest his head when he sits next to me (and that cushion is certainly my cat's favorite place!). The irony is that I was cruel to my body when it came the closest to meeting the unrealistic standard of my society that worships sex, and now that I am morphing farther and farther from those ripped abs, I feel more kindness towards my body than ever. It is a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 5:19-20). It is a member of Christ himself (I Cor 5:12-17) It is the place that God's Spirit and my spirit reside together. It is a holy gift infused with life that allows me to interact with the world God has placed me in.

I think the most recent exponential change in my attitude happened at an intense, personal growth retreat a few years ago. Within 72 hours I shifted from feeling trapped inside of my head and body with a mortal enemy, to seeing myself as part child and part adult - a mother, in fact. This transformation in my thinking allowed me to see a new dynamic within myself. I was empowered to speak as a loving parent to the not-so-mature-childish parts of myself. For example: "I know you want the entire bag of cookies, but one or two will really satisfy you and if you eat the entire bag, you are going to feel sick and think you are a bad person. Let's take two cookies out of the bag and put the rest away and see how you

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feel after that.”

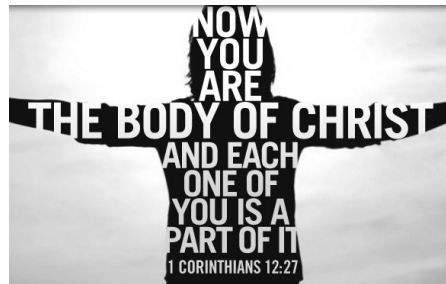
As ridiculous (and slightly schizophrenic) as this sounds, what has been emerging is kindness and love for myself and my body. It is transforming the way I do most everything. I take my body for a walk because I know it will feel good now and make it healthier in the long run. I am choosing smaller portions of food and buying bigger clothes instead of stuffing myself into the old ones that are too small and uncomfortable. This is such a polar opposite experience from my bulimic days when I punished my body – running with bleeding blisters and ripped ligaments. I was motivated by hatred and I still bear the scars and the limp to remind me of that time. Let me be clear that this attitude change is not to narcissistic self-absorption or saccharine indulgence. I’m talking about good parenting. And good parenting has an end goal of training a mature adult.

I want to accomplish the tasks laid out for me on my journey here. I want to be available as long as possible to play with my grandchildren and great grandchildren. I want to be able to offer to mow the neighbor’s lawn. I want to be as clear headed and pain free as I can by lightening my toxin and calorie load so that I can attend to the business of loving people without being distracted.

And as I read the book of Ephesians today, I suddenly saw the connection between this loving of my physical body and my external call to love the

body of Christ. I am practicing humility, gentleness, and patience (Eph 4:2) with myself that makes me stronger to do the very same thing for the other parts of the other Body I am a member of – Christ’s Body.

As I practice an attitude of gratitude for each part of my body regardless of its achiness or ugliness, I can learn to love the parts of Christ’s body – even the ones who are hurtful or hateful. Love is the root of all of God’s commands: Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. So by practicing love & kindness with my own body, I am practicing how to interact with the Body of Christ as well: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4:15-16).



(Addiction continued from page 2)

they need to be in sexual situations. Finally, I needed to watch people actually having sex, sometimes with multiple partners. My addiction was spiraling out of control.

- 3) *The behaviors begin to intrude into the primary aspects of my life.* Whereas in the beginning of an addictive behavior, our “fix” is something we do in our spare time, it ultimately begins to take over. Rather than opting to spend time with my family or friends when an opportunity came along, I began to choose to indulge in pornography instead. Or, at the end of a long, exhausting day, I would decide to spend just a little time looking at pornography. My intent was to spend a few minutes but that became a few hours and the sleep I really needed was no longer an option. I began the next day depleted. Or, I would lose track of time and be late for an appointment or a dinner with a friend.

I have found it helpful to consider these three factors in asking myself if something is an addiction. I used pornography as an illustration from my life, but I could also pull examples from how I have turned to food, television, or spending money in addictive ways. It takes courage to ask the question, “Is the thing I am struggling most with an addiction?” It takes even more fortitude to consider the

three things I have written about here and be as honest as you are able. If you believe that you are facing an addiction, there are some amazing resources available. I will list a few books below for you as a place to begin. But also keep in mind that this is what WGA is here for. If you’d like to reach out and ask for help, please do not hesitate to contact our office. WGA provides a variety of groups, discipleship, education, and even good referrals to professional counselors with whom we have built relationships over the years. Please let us know how we can be of help to you in your journey.

Next month, I will return to the topic of addiction and address the “Three Spiritual Questions” to ask on the journey of healing, taken from *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* by Dr. Mark R Laaser.

Recommended Reading:

*Addiction and Grace* by Gerald May  
*Out of the Shadows* by Patrick Carnes  
*Facing the Shadow Workbook* by Patrick Carnes  
*Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* by Dr. Mark R Laaser



*(Memories continued from page 3)*

another. Build up hope so you'll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it. 1Th 5:11

Remind the people to respect the government and be law-abiding, always ready to lend a helping hand. No insults, no fights. God's people should be big-hearted and courteous. It wasn't so long ago that we ourselves were stupid and stubborn, dupes of sin, ordered every which way by our glands, going around with a chip on our shoulder, hated and hating back. But when God, our kind and loving Savior God, stepped in, he saved us from all that. It was all his doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this. I want you to put your foot down. Take a firm stand on these matters so that those who have put their trust in God will concentrate on the essentials that are good for everyone. Stay away from mindless, pointless quarreling over genealogies and fine print in the law code. That gets you nowhere. Warn a quarrelsome person once or twice, but then be done with him. It's obvious that such a person is out of line, rebellious against God. By persisting in divisiveness he cuts himself off. Tit 3:1-11

Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word. Let's see how inventive we can

be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching. Heb 10:24-25

Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others? Jas 4:11-12

Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. 1Pe 4:9

If we claim that we experience a shared life with him and continue to stumble around in the dark, we're obviously lying through our teeth—we're not living what we claim. But if we walk in the light, God himself being the light, we also experience a shared life with one another, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God's Son, purges all our sin. 1Jo 1:6-7

Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Jas 5:16



## May In Review

**May 25th: Memorial Weekend Picnic—It was great to see all that attended!**

### **Thursday Night Group**

**May 2nd: 28 people**

**May 9th: 28 people**

**May 16th: 31 people**

**May 23rd: 27 people**

**May 30th: 43 people**

**Orientation meeting - 6 new people**

## June And Beyond

**June 30th: WGA will be presenting at Denver Area Youth for Christ**

**July 6th: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry**

**July 18th: Monthly Orientation Meeting required for participation in WGA's Thursday Night Group—invite a friend!**

## Prayer Requests

**Please pray for WGA's finances**

**Please pray for our staff this summer as they each take a month sabbatical: Roger in June, Scott in July and Mary in August.**

### WGA Staff

**Roger Jones**  
Executive Director

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**Mary Heathman**  
Founding Director

**Steve Huston**  
Chaplain/Church Liaison

**Jill Huston**  
Family & Friends Coordinator

*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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