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ADDICTIONS—FINDING HELP AND HOPE

By Christy Demetriades, MS

In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul said: "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing." This summarizes the experience of many who fight addictions. Indeed, addiction is a common human experience. Twenty years ago, addiction meant alcohol or drugs. Now the literature describing addictions includes sex, gambling, shopping, food, exercise, the internet, anger and work.

All human behaviors have a purpose or function. The function of most addictions is to reduce physical or emotional pain. Addictions may provide immediate relief, but they cause long term painful consequences. What addicts fail to realize is that the momentary relief they experience is nothing compared to the massive heartbreak that is awaiting them down the road. Sometimes, God allows us to experience pain so that we turn to Him and lean on Him. When you look at what an addiction actually does, it takes a person out of relationship with God when the addict substitutes an object for a relationship with God. An addiction can be viewed as idolatry because, in essence, it is replacing the most important thing in our life - our relationship with God. Exodus 20:3 says, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." God made it very clear that we are not to put anything before our relationship with Him.

Luke 12:34 says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Today, in our fast paced society, it is easy to get caught up with many activities (e.g., school, work, church, sports, clubs, volunteering, children's events, PTA, and a litany of other things). With the increasing demands that society has placed upon us, the stress can be overwhelming. The mistaken belief that more money, a higher position at work, a bigger house, a better car, or living in a more exclusive zip code causes some people to turn to work to meet their unfulfilled needs. Others believe that if they just purchase one more item, they will find happiness, but happiness eludes them. They are all caught in an endless cycle that will continue to give them the same results - emptiness and sorrow. The only way to achieve true happiness and healing is through Jesus Christ.

Free-will is an aspect of the human spirit. The spiritual component does not make us impervious to the extremely powerful forces of biology and environment, but it enables us to make choices that are not completely controlled by them. It is helpful to know that the Apostle Paul completely identifies with those who are caught in the mire of addictions, destructive compulsive behaviors, and obsessive thoughts. Paul, like all human beings, struggled with his human nature. He poignantly wrote: "No matter which way I turn I cannot make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway." (Romans 7:18-19, New Living Translation) Paul described these behaviors as "foolishness" because they result in painful exploitation of self and others. In stern words, he wrote, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another." (Titus 3: 3-4) Elsewhere, the Bible reminds us of humanity's fallen nature and its potential to nearly trounce free-will: "For a man is slave to whatever has mastered him..." (2 Peter 2:19) Biblically, then, we hear about enslavement, a logical sequence of events where addictive behaviors run amok and lead to an out of control life. The 12-Step model echoes this perspective in Step 1: "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable."



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ADDICTIONS (Continued)

In light of this strong Biblical language, it is essential to recognize that the Apostle Paul also preached the amazing news that "there is no condemnation..." for these behaviors (Romans 8:1). He was not interested in placing blame on those who are struggling, but in compassionately reaching out to them and introducing them to healing through Jesus Christ. We are not only flesh and bone. We have a spirit within us that responds to the encouragement and direction of the Scriptures and the still small voice of God speaking within us. We are loved by a God who offers us redemption. With these sources of strength, we can choose freedom. The 12-step model echoes this perspective, particularly in Steps 2 and 3: "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," and "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God..." In these steps, a decision is made - an act of free will, assisted by a "power greater than ourselves..."

Addictions are powerful. Emotions can be numbed by any object that a person uses to avoid the real issues that need to be faced. God offers a special promise for those who are in this place of hardship and suffering, who have come to believe there is no hope or escape. "But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out, so that you will not give in to it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) Sometimes the "way out" is admitting that the problem has overwhelmed us and deciding to get help from a professional. Often the "way out" arrives when another human being comes alongside and becomes the hands and feet of Jesus for the one who is suffering. In order to escape the gravitational pull of both biology and environment, those who struggle with addictions typically need help from others - loved ones, professionals, support groups, and the church community. "A way out" or a "way of escape" often refers to a narrow mountain pass through which a trapped army can escape from an enemy seeking their destruction. One must decide to take the escape. The Bible assures us that it will be provided. There is help and hope available to those struggling with addictions. The road is not easy, but God will be with you every step of the way, and if you have a willing heart and truly desire to change, transformation is possible through the love of Jesus Christ! The choice is yours.

Blowing Bubbles

By Christina Browning, LCSW

I'm not exactly sure when I fell in love with bubbles, but I am more convinced than ever that bubbles are perfect. Have you ever seen a non-perfect floating bubble? They can be big or small, some with color, some just clear, regardless of what created it, floating bubbles are perfect! It's that perfection that captured my attention. I was sitting in my office, blowing bubbles to lighten the tension in the atmosphere, when I noticed how round and perfect each one is. They are all different sizes, some even have rainbows, some don't. Some of the bubbles linger in the air for a while, some instantly pop. Some land and sit on a surface before popping, some don't make it. So what's the big deal about bubbles you ask?

The deal is that these bubbles in my office were created when I breathed life into them! I took a deep breath, blew into the bubble wand and out came beautiful, perfectly round bubbles! I could control when some of them got big, or some small. It got me thinking about what God's been teaching me these days. I was having my quiet time and felt like God said, "Don't let the fear to hope for who you want to be, prevent you from being the person God created you to be right now." Genesis 2:7 says, "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being." Psalms 150:6 tells us, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." This means, God breathed His life into me. Because I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior, He breathes life into me daily, helping to create me just the way I am today! I'm not too big or too small. I'm not too messed up or too dysfunctional! I am His work in progress.

Negative Body Image Warning Signs

During the warm weather season, negative body perceptions are aggravated for many people. Clothing is thinner and less substantial, increasing feelings of inadequacy which manifest as poor body image. It is during this time that men and women sometimes take drastic measures to try and get their bodies to an "ideal" size they feel comfortable showing off in the summer - and these drastic measures can lead to eating disorders.

"Many people begin the warm-weather season thinking they need to lose a few pounds to look good. They may go on a crash diet or begin a cycle of bingeing and purging," said Kimberly Dennis, M.D., medical director at Timberline Knolls Residential Treatment Center, a 43-acre residential treatment center for women and adolescent girls suffering from eating disorders, substance abuse and other co-occurring disorders. "Positive reinforcement of this sudden weight loss by peers could cause a person to feel like he or she must maintain that type of body to feel good about him or herself, and this can trigger or reinforce eating disorder behaviors."

Watching for warning signs of an eating disorder during these months leading up to the summer is crucial for loved ones and friends - and not being afraid to talk to someone if you suspect they have a problem. Eating disorders can quickly spiral out of control, so the earlier they are addressed, the more likely the individual is to find recovery and begin to work on their own self-esteem and body image issues.

Many people who suffer from eating disorders are not clinically overweight - they simply see themselves in a distorted fashion - so it is best to consult with a doctor if you want advice about losing weight. Most people have difficulty seeing the impact of an unhealthy relationship

Blowing Bubbles (cont.)

Today I'm honoring God by breathing and working on being the person He has for me to be today! Are you? As I seek to grow to become the person He asks me to be today, I can rest in knowing....I AM His creation! Praise God for who you are today, and take time to blow bubbles and glorify God!



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Negative Body Image Signs (cont.)

with food, eating, exercise, or their body fully on their own. If not identified or treated during the early stages, eating disorders can become chronic, debilitating and even life-threatening. Professional help can lead to a greater sense of peace and manageability.



Meier Clinics provides Christian counseling at Timberline Knolls for those residents who request it.

New Faith-based Hospital Programs

Meier Clinics is pleased to be partnering with Ascend Health Corporation in starting faith-based inpatient programs at University Behavioral Health in El Paso, Texas, and Cedar Hills Hospital in Portland, Oregon. Patients who request the Meier Clinics Faith-Based Program will be using the *Journey to Joy Workbook* that was created by Meier Clinics staff to assist patients in their healing process. For more information about this hospital program, contact Meier Clinics at 888-7CLINIC (888-725-4642).

"Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word."

Psalm 119:37

Mental Health needs don't take a vacation just because it's summer!

Your financial help and prayers are vitally important every month of the year for those who otherwise couldn't afford Christian counseling care. Thank you for partnering with us to change lives.

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Thank you for taking time out of your day to read our newsletter. We hope it has been encouraging and enlightening. If there is a topic you would like us to address in the future, please feel free to contact us at info@meierclinics.com.

If you would like to speak with one of our staff members, please call us at 888-7CLINIC to be directed to the Meier Clinics nearest you. Or you may contact us by e-mail at intakepost@meierclinics.com.

