

The Spirit of Evil

A YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO ADDICTION

(DOING BATTLE WITH THE
DEMONS THAT EVERYBODY
WANTS TO KEEP SECRET)

Ok everybody, now we have come to a very difficult topic in our journey toward Confirmation. We have talked and read lots about how Confirmation is all about a “relationship” with God. We have talked lots about “relationships” in general and the nature of relationships. In fact, relationships of all kinds seem to be something we desire, while at the same time they can be something so difficult to do, have or understand. The following “*Young Person’s Guide to Addiction*” is all about some of the common and even uncommon struggles and difficulties that can develop in a relationship. We can use the word “addiction,” in this context, because some struggles in relationship can grow into a pattern of behavior that is harmful to the person(s) involved. That harmful pattern of behavior can become something very difficult to escape and may develop into an addiction. I want to talk about some of these difficulties and help bring them into the light. The following section discloses many harsh realities.

What is an addiction?

An addiction is any unhealthy behavior that a human person is abnormally and uncontrollably attracted to which typically manifests itself as repetitive action that causes harm to the person(s) involved.

What is the nature of attraction in addiction?

Persons are attracted to many things:

- *Chocolate
- *Movies
- *fun experiences
- *roller coasters
- *sports
- *television
- *girls
- *guys
- *beer
- *excitement
- *relationship
- *succeeding or doing well
- *attention – being noticed and esteemed
- *power, control of our situations
- *peace – security
- *love

Many people go to the movies, ride roller coasters, play sports, and attempt to find peace, among other things, since these kinds of experiences attract us. Most of these things are gifts from God. There are many things persons are “attracted” to, generally speaking, so what’s the point?

When an attraction leads to unhealthy behavior

An attraction to something good, such as chocolate, relationship or sports is God-given and good. An attraction to something negative, such as illegal narcotics, can become bad or even worse when we find ourselves desiring it constantly and doing whatever it takes to get what we desire.

If a person is attracted to being noticed, esteemed or recognized they may go about getting attention in healthy or unhealthy ways. A healthy way of getting attention is saying to a friend: *“I need to talk to you later today, can we meet?”* An unhealthy way of getting attention is by excessive flirting, talking negatively to or about people so that you may be respected or noticed, or through an attempt to be “the life of the party” by way of drunkenness.

Example:

One of my friends from seminary tells the story of when he used to be addicted to movies. He found himself going to the movie theatre nearly every day by himself to watch movies. He enjoyed movies very much and there didn’t seem to be anything wrong with watching lots of movies. He was working a job (this was before he entered seminary) and had plenty of money to do this. The sober realization for him occurred when he realized that he was going to movies because he was lonely. He felt the pain of his loneliness and then went to the movies to numb the internal pain. For a period of two hours, he could forget about what he was suffering. The habit became stronger and stronger. Instead of seeking friendships and relationships in healthy ways, he sought movies and entertainment in order to numb the pain of being lonely. Later, he admitted that it was easier for him to do this rather than invest the work it takes to establish good friendships.

Example:

The following is a fictional story of someone named “Jennifer,” although this story fits a common profile in young people today. Jennifer is a 24 year old female. The story of Jennifer is simply that she had many boyfriends. She seemed to have a new boyfriend every two or three months and was never able to maintain one for a longer period of time. She also had an interesting pattern of friendships. She would meet new friends and remain friends for about three to six months. Then she would find and establish new friends, while severing ties with “old” friends. Soon enough, after being around Jennifer for a period of time, one could see the pattern. She seemed to enjoy the excitement of meeting new people, whether they became her date or her boyfriend. But the lasting components of relationship that endure didn’t seem to remain for her. She didn’t seem to enjoy getting to know the person. She didn’t enjoy letting the person get to know her in an authentic way. So, she would avoid the lasting, vulnerable stages of relationship. She was addicted to what is called the “lymric stage,” of relationship.

The “lymric stage,” of relationship is the first stage in any relationship and it happens especially in romance. When two people begin to become friends, or when they begin to date or when they begin to “fall in love,” there are typically feelings of excitement and new possibilities. Soon each person is looking to the other for many things. They are happy and it is good to be happy and excited at this time. Each person will spend a lot of time “counting their blessings,” in the other. Each will say and believe things such as, “Oh, she is perfect. She is exactly what I need and want. There is no flaw in her at all and I am so in love.” This is a natural course of events and is healthy and good... as long as the relationship, especially in romance, develops into something else mature, realistic and enduring. (Remember, love “endures all things.” Cor. 13) Jennifer was staying in the addiction so she would not have to deal with the sometimes less pleasant, but necessary, stages of relationship when two people grow into their own weaknesses and accept one another for who they really are.

Reasons for addictions:

The main reason for an addiction to develop is that there becomes a noticeable deficiency of some kind that the person may or may not recognize inside. A person will feel “empty,” in some area of his/her life and try to fill up the feelings of emptiness. When the person fills up the emptiness in unhealthy habitual ways, an addiction develops.

- *It is not easy to realize our own “emptiness.”
- *It is not easy to admit that we have “emptiness.”
- *It is not easy to deal with our own “emptiness.”
- *It is not easy to ask for help in dealing with our “emptiness.”

This “emptiness,” can be anything from loneliness, low self-esteem, a bad break-up, feelings of insecurity or anxiety, feeling abandoned by people who are supposed to love us, loss of a job or position on a team, bad grades (usually connected to some kind of feeling(s) of inadequacy), worry, anger, stress, depression, or anything associated with the cause of negative, painful feelings within a person.

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Examples of a normal deficiency and how to deal with it in a healthy, “positive,” way(s).

Normal deficiency: When we’re sick we experience a physical deficiency. We are not feeling well. As a result, we stay home for work and school to rest and feel better. Sometimes we take medicine.

Normal deficiency: Experiencing an upcoming test or job interview that we are not confident or prepared to face. This feeling of “deficiency” causes us to study or prepare for what we do not know in order to feel more confident and positive regarding the upcoming event.

Normal deficiency: Becoming nervous on a first date or on the first day of school. As a result of these examples there are many who experience anxiety when meeting new people. Yet, despite the nervous feelings which are quite normal, we go anyway.

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Examples of a normal deficiency and how it is dealt with in an unhealthy, “negative,” way(s).

Normal deficiency with an unhealthy way to cope, and the development of addiction:

Feeling like we’re not good enough or not having received enough encouragement, support, positive reinforcement we may begin to gossip or speak ill of another or many others. This may come from envy (which is a bad feeling that we experience inside of ourselves when we see the good that comes to another. We are sad since that goodness, reward, attention, etc. did not come to us). We can easily develop an addiction to envy, gossip, or various other vices that are uncharitable.

Normal deficiency with an unhealthy way to cope, and the development of addiction:

If a person struggles with an unhealthy understanding of self, or low self-esteem (which many, many people struggle with) this can lead to depression and feelings of worthiness. The person can develop a pattern of negative thinking which prohibits the person from feeling good or worthy about receiving love or friendship. Soon the person will not seek relationship, which he/she so much desires to have.

Normal deficiency with an unhealthy way to cope, and the development of addiction:

When a person feels lonely, they may seek unhealthy ways to “fill up.” This is usually the source of sexual addiction. Sexual addiction comes in the form of pornography, or repetitive sexual relationships, among other things. A person who feels lonely may seek artificial venues to intimacy (pornography, masturbation) or the person may establish one, some or several relationships that will develop because of the loneliness. Another effect of unhealthy coping with loneliness is drug and alcohol use and abuse. A person experiences the pain of loneliness may turn to a physical high to numb or forget the pain. If the person remains lonely, the person will usually develop a quick drug or alcohol addiction, if that is their addiction of choice. There are many other things, besides loneliness, that can easily develop into sexual, drug or alcohol addictions. Loneliness is one that is more common.

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Examples of some “abnormal deficiencies” (something bad that happened to someone that should never have happened – and/or is highly traumatic) and how it develops into an addiction.

Abnormal deficiency with an extremely unhealthy way to cope, and the development of addiction:

After a person has undergone much suffering in life (physical or sexual abuse, loss of parents to jail, abandonment or death, violence at home or among peers, separation, extreme trauma from rape, etc.) there comes an incredible painfulness inside. The memories of these examples, the anger from them or the total loss of trust results frequently in very unhealthy ways of coping. This is true because the examples are so extreme and difficult to deal with. A common addiction which develops in this case is that of self-harm. A person experiences the pain of their past suffering and it haunts them all of the time. In order to escape that internal pain they begin to cut on themselves, burn themselves, pull out their own hair or even to punch and bite themselves, or to throw themselves into walls. (I have met and worked with people who suffer from all of these examples of self-harm.) The adrenaline rush that comes from the physical pain of self-harm masks the emotional pain that is inside. Then, for a short period of time (approximately 30 minutes) the inside pain goes away and the experience of an adrenaline rush takes its place. If the person does not find help to better cope, an addiction easily develops.

Some of the most common Addictions:

1) Addiction to the first stages of a relationship, especially a romantic relationship:

This addiction is exactly the case for the above example with the character Jennifer. Jennifer was afraid of moving into the latter, more mature stages of relationship that seem even more risky sometimes. These latter stages seem more risky because there is a deeper level of trust and knowledge of the persons involved. You have to come to know the person in their strengths and in their weaknesses. Then, you can make the choice to accept the other for who they really are, or to not accept them for who they really are. One of the two of those choices had to occur and many people are afraid of one or both of these choices.

Jennifer's case could have been different as well. A person who is addicted to the "lymric" stage of relationship could be addicted to the excitement of meeting new people consistently and receiving that kind of attention. This could have been the case for Jennifer.

Or, perhaps Jennifer was too quick to become sexually active with her boyfriends. This is, unfortunately, very common today. When two people have sex with one another, an incredible internal bond is developed between them. Bonding is one of the purposes of human sexuality – a God given purpose. Its purpose is to keep a couple together "in good times and in bad, until death do us part." The bond is so profound that it is never, ever intended to be broken. (That is one of the many, many reasons that real love reverences and respects the power and beauty of human sexuality – real love waits, that is, for the only proper relationship which can reverence sex. This relationship is the sacrament of marriage.) But, what happens when the bond is broken once? What happens when the bond is broken again and again? Imagine what would happen to a person if the bond was established and broken many times over. Eventually, the bond disappears and the person can no longer bond to another. *(it's like a piece of duct tape. If I put that thin on my arm and pull it off, I will yell and scream because of the pain. The piece of duct tape will have all the hair from my arm attached to itself. If I take that same piece of duct tape and apply it to the arm of 10 other people, eventually it will lose it's power to stick to anything.)* Jennifer may have been addicted to the early, "lymric" stages of relationship because she was incapable of feeling anything beyond that, due to sexual promiscuity. To her, what she did was completely normal. But, imagine a life that continued on this way for several years, or even decades. It would be a life of emptiness constantly meeting people, trying to love them and then saying goodbye to them very soon.

These are three possibilities that attempt to explain Jennifer's situation. There are even more possibilities that could explain Jennifer's behavior. These are some of the most common explanation / addictions that I have seen in people.

2) Sexual addictions:

The nature of sexual addictions is very vast and complicated. It is much too complicated for me to explain in a short paragraph. But, I can touch the surface of sexual addictions.

Sex is good. Sex is good. Sex is holy and sex is good. This is how God intended it anyway. But, today sex is something that has become a vice for many, many people. It is something seen as desirable, but not virtuous in our culture. Everybody seems to want sex, but few people seem to want the responsibility and love that goes with sex. So, people are being used and abused, families are being disrupted, affairs and divorce are at all time highs, commitment is not really valued any more, people are seeking pleasure for themselves at whatever the cost, and pornography is one of the leading industries because it is in such a high demand. Young people are authentically looking to marry and live happy, holy family lives are scared to do so.

Sexual acting out becomes an addiction because of two main reasons, I have observed. The **first** is that people genuinely want to love and be loved. (This is the supreme desire of the human heart.) The problem is that few people know how to really love anymore as men and women. Do you want to be a real Man? Do you want to be a real woman? These are the questions that people are not asking and when they do ask the question, they are incapable of answering the question since no one seems to be a good teacher of authentic man and womanhood. When people are lonely and they recognize their desire to be close to another of the opposite sex, they know only one thing: embark on a sexual relationship because that is what I have been taught. To ease the pain of loneliness and to fulfill the desires of the heart, people engage in sex.

Then what Happens? This is the **second** main reason people develop sexual addictions. Sex is meant to be pleasurable. In fact, for a married couple, sex is intended to be an experience of God – an ecstasy, a foretaste of Heaven. (*Ecstasy, is the term used in theology to describe the most intimate experience of God in love that can be given to a human person. The Saints experienced ecstasy in their prayer.*) God wants to give us Himself. He wants to give us an experience of Himself in sex. When two people have sex, they experience great joy and pleasure and ecstasy. It is a gift. Most people forget that it is a gift and they will want to take for themselves, as much as possible, the experience. My point is that sex has become such an addiction because it is highly pleasurable and when a person gets into that cycle it is very hard to break the cycle. They will get into the cycle for many reasons: loneliness, fear, boredom, low self-esteem, anxiety or worry, because they don't know any better, frustration, anger, abuse, or plain desire and curiosity, among many other things.

3) The addiction to the “negative voice.”

What is the “negative voice?” You probably know already. It is the voice that we listen to which comes from inside of our self that feeds us with negativity. No one hears this voice except for ourselves. “Benjamin, you're not good enough. You're an idiot. You are too scared to do that. You are not worthy to be loved. You're a dork. Nobody will listen to you. People do not follow you. You are not a real man. You are not a disciple.” These are some examples of my own negative voice.

The negative voice is a voice which does not come to us from the Holy Spirit. It is the voice that attacks us and harms us. It is a voice worthy of fighting since God desires us to hear another voice. He desires us to hear His own voice which is the inner voice of love. “Benjamin, you are loved. Benjamin, you are a beautiful person. You can easily do that and I will help. You are a real man, a real disciple.”

The negative voice comes from many places. Usually it comes out of our own fallen nature and our fear. (“We saw you coming Lord and we were afraid, so we hid ourselves.” Gen. 3:10) Our fear can come from poor self-esteem, bad experiences from the past, abuse, inability to trust, abandonment, or a bad home life. The negative voice can come from a perfectly healthy background as well. It becomes an addiction when we listen to it constantly and allow it to direct our lives. The negative voice is the road to many other addictions.

4) Cutting (Self-harm):

Above all other forms of self-harm, cutting seems to be the most common, especially among adolescents. It is more common among adolescent girls than boys.

“Cutting” occurs when a person makes a self-inflicted incision on his/her body with the intention to cause physical pain, with the desired outcome, goal, or hope being relief for some type of emotional or psychological disturbance. Typically, cutting occurs on the wrists and ankles. However, cuts can be made all over the human body including another common location: the hips. A person inflicting self-harm in the form of cutting often attempts to hide the cuts and inflict incisions when no others are present. Typical “warning signs” can be difficult to perceive, but what always remain are the appearance of incision(s), or scar tissue. Ironically, cutting is less frequently associated with suicide attempts and more frequently associated with “negative coping skills.” Suicide is, of course, affiliated with self-harm and is considered the most violent type of “self-inflicted wound.”

If a person is cutting themselves, suicidal thoughts and actions may be a desired outcome. However, suicide is not necessarily an immediate or distant goal for those who cut themselves seeking to “cope.”

A person who inflicts self-harm in the form of cutting seems to adapt this type of “negative coping skill” for a common, overarching reason (although no “self-harm” can be entirely generalized). Typically, the self-inflicted incision(s) act as an adrenaline rush and an escape from internal pain that is deeply emotional or psychological. Cutting in-frequently happens once or twice in those who experiment or struggle with this negative coping skill. More typically, cutting develops into a severe addiction. The severity of self-harm inflicted is commonly the effect of the more intense emotional or psychological pain the person suffers. From my experience, those adolescents I’ve worked with who cut themselves do so because of traumatic life experiences they are incapable of coping with or processing such as: a history of sexual abuse, rape, physical abuse, drug use and abuse, or abandonment by family members that causes the severe loss of trust. I’ve known several cases in which the parents of their adolescent children have prostituted their own kids for the exchange of drugs or illegal narcotics over the course of many years beginning as early as age two or three years old. These are horrible realities. The young person usually lives with the memory and the pain of those extremely traumatic experiences which often result in many, many years of behavioral, psychological, mood and anxiety disorder. In order to forget horrible past experiences, or to numb the emotional and psychological pain, these types of victims of abuse cut themselves (although not every person who inflicts self-harm has suffered past abuse). The adrenaline, blood and physical pain of the self-inflicted wound mask the internal pain of deeper emotional and psychological issues for approximately 30 minutes. There is “relief” which functions as a coping mechanism. This type of “coping” is negative since it causes harm to one self. Typically, if a person finds no other way to address these emotional and psychological wounds in positive ways (professional counselling, serious medical attention, excellent friendships and adult help, and God’s healing graces) cutting can easily become an addiction.

A person who cuts (or inflicts self-harm of any kind), needs immediate help. Often they need to be rescued against their own will.

Is there help?

Yes, there is help. Regarding every circumstance from above there is help available. Often, skilled or professional help is absolutely necessary. The sad reality regarding addictions is that the cycle cannot usually be broken by the individual who is addicted. Persons who have addictions need our help. They may or may not know it. They may or may not desire to receive help. From my experience, it is more common that those who suffer from addictions do not want to receive help at all. In fact, those suffering any of the aforementioned addictions often become very upset when help is offered or suggested.

Addictions are intensely difficult because of the nature of enslavement which motivates the behavior. Addictive behavior is usually **shameful**. Persons who suffer addictions commonly desire to hide the addiction. It frequently becomes a dark **secret** that seeks to be hidden at very high costs. Often, persons who suffer from addictions deny their behavior when and if they are discovered and / or confronted. Addictions affect persons so profoundly because they are extremely **powerful**.

How can we get help?

- 1) Notice the addiction in yourself or another.
- 2) Admit the addiction in yourself or another.
- 3) Confront your friend, if you have the courage, or tell someone you trust about your own struggle, if you have the will.

- 4) If not: you may have to get help to confront your friend. If you suffer an addiction yourself, you will probably not have the desire or will to seek help for yourself. That is the nature of addiction. Addiction enslaves us to remain addicted. Usually a person, despite their lacking desire and will to find help for themselves, will find little ways to subtly hint to the people they trust regarding their problem. Those suffering addictions seldom come right out and ask for help. But, they will frequently leave signs that they do, indeed, need help.
- 5) Look for the signs in the people close to you:
- *Depressed mood, or frequently sad
 - *Unusually happy or spastic/hyper
 - *Excessive and unexplainable anger
 - *Violence
 - *Excessive crying
 - *Acting out behavior in classes, or in public
 - *Risk taking
 - *Covering up the wrists with longer clothing
 - *secrets, unusual behavior, not disclosing where they were last night

Spiritual Exercise for Help and Healing

How old are you?

When did you learn to cope with grief, loss, trauma and pain?

Do you ever feel internal painfulness, fear, insecurity, anxiety, worry, despair, etc?

Describe how you feel most of the time in as much detail as possible.

(i.e. “I feel unmotivated, scared and worried for the future. I don’t trust anyone but I want to. I feel lonely and sad. I miss my boyfriend/girlfriend. I miss my Grandmother or my Dad. I don’t care about anything. I feel tired and anxious, like an idiot, hurt. I feel angry.”)

When you are finished, directly ask God to be with you now. Ask directly for Him to help or heal you from this pain. Ask Him to show you what that pain is, if you have had trouble recognizing it. Then, once you have acknowledged this pain tell Him about how it hurts you. Tell him directly – don’t try to judge the pain or explain it – simply acknowledge it and tell Him.

Ex: “Lord, I feel lonely.” **Not:** “Lord, I feel lonely *because*.

Now, choose one of the following passages in Scripture to read:

Lk 15:11-32 forgiveness, mercy

Jn 20:24-30 doubts

Mk 14:32-42 sorrow

Mt 27:45-56 pain

Mk 9:14-29 healing

Mt 14:22-33 fear

Mt 21:18-22 faith

Mk 10:46-52 sight

Jn 14:1-14 encouragement

After you have read the passage of your choice, wait a few minutes. Think about that reading. Take your pen, and write down one word that stands out most to you. It could also be one phrase, like “do not be afraid,” for example, or “Come.” This word or phrase may come to you again and again. It may be in your brain and the only thing you remember about the reading.

Now, ask God – “Lord, what is this about? Why this word or this phrase?” Be silent for a few more minutes and clear your mind of everything. Try hard not to think of anything at all. Then, something

will probably come into your mind. That which comes into your mind / heart most powerfully or most apparently – maybe a memory, something coming up in the future, something you’ve worried about, discomfort, anxiety, a conversation, a person, etc. This is probably what God is communicating to you now.

When you think of whatever that thing is, does it cause you joy, peace, consolidation, excitement, happiness, etc.? Or, does it cause you unrest, fear, desolation, unhappiness, pain, etc? If that thing causes you consolation, then give thanks to God. If it causes you some desolation, unrest, fear, unhappiness, pain, etc. then do the following:

Return to the word or phrase in Scripture that seems to be standing out above all the rest. Ask God what this has to do with your pain, desolation or anxiety. Usually there is a connection. God will usually be trying to heal you of something from your past at this time. Continue in this conversation with God and repeat this spiritual exercise as needed.

Spiritual Exercise

How to deal with fear and scary things

How old are you? _____

When did you learn that some things were scary to you like clowns, ghosts, death, or failure?

Do you ever feel scared, insecure, anxious, worried, despair, etc. . . . Anything you can think of that is scary or fearful? _____

Think about how that feels inside of you and then write down here as much as possible in detail. . . .

(Benjamin’s example: “ I feel unmotivated, scared and worried for the future. I don’t trust anyone but I want to. I feel lonely and sad. I miss my boyfriend/girlfriend. I miss my grandmother or my dad. I don’t care about anything. I feel tired and anxious, like an idiot, hurt. I feel angry.”)

Ok, here is space for your example:

When you are finished, directly ask God to be with you now. Ask directly for Him to help or heal you from this fear, or pain or whatever it is that is scary or negative. Ask Him to show you what that pain or fear is, if you have had trouble recognizing it. Then once you have acknowledged this pain tell Him about how it hurts you or how it scares you. Tell him directly – don’t try to judge the pain or explain it – simply acknowledge it and tell him.

Example: “Lord, I feel lonely.”

Example: “Lord i feel scared about . . .

Now, choose one of the following passages in Scripture to read:

Lk 15:11-32 forgiveness, mercy

Jn 20:24-30 doubts

Mk 14:32-42 sorrow

Mt 27:45-56 pain

Mk 9:14-29 healing

Mt 14:22-33 fear

Mt 21:18-22 faith

Psalm 23 fear

Mk 10:46-52 sight

Romans 8:38, 39 fear

Jn 14:1-14 encouragement

1 Jn 4:15-18 fear

After you have read the passage of your choice, wait a few minutes. Think about that reading. Was there one word or phrase that “leapt off the page at you?” Write down that word or phrase. How does it make you feel? Write down how that word or phrase made you feel:

Here is the word or phrase: _____

The word or phrase makes me feel: _____

If you made it to the end and you feel scared, depressed, sad, painful, fearful, or anything negative . . . pray this prayer: “God, I went through all of that and still feel scared. Please help me. I offer you my pain and fear as a prayer and oblation for the salvation of the whole world, for mercy everywhere, for souls in purgatory, and for reparation of sins. Please come and heal me soon. Amen” Repeat this spiritual exercise as needed.