

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Addiction & Grace

Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions

by

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CHAPTER 1:

DESIRE: ADDICTION AND HUMAN FREEDOM

1. In the first chapter of *Addiction & Grace*, May describes the empty longing we all feel inside; “whether we are consciously religious or not, this desire is our deepest longing and our most precious treasure.” Do you agree with May’s assessment of the human condition? Do you relate to this longing, and if so, is it something you feel

- on a daily basis? In what ways have you attempted to satiate this longing?
2. May discusses large addictions as well as seemingly harmless small addictions. What are your small addictions? Do you believe these to be actual addictions or simply habits? Do you feel that these behaviors have a negative impact on your life?
 3. Do you agree with May's statement that, "all people are addicts, and addiction to alcohol and other drugs are simply more obvious and tragic than other addictions"? This is one of the main premises of the book. At this stage, are you convinced that this is true? If you have already finished the book, how did your opinion on this subject change from Chapter 1 to Chapter 8?
 4. On page 18, May describes the strength of hope that we all have inside of us. Do you feel that you have this strength that he describes? If so, when have you seen it manifest itself in your life?

CHAPTER 2: EXPERIENCE: THE QUALITIES OF ADDICTION

1. If you are in a setting where you feel comfortable admitting your larger addictions, what are they? Do you recognize yourself or any of your loved ones in the stories May shares at the beginning of Chapter 2?
2. In Chapter 2, May lists the five characteristics that define true addiction: tolerance, withdrawal, self-deception, loss of willpower, and distortion of attention. Do you

- relate to this list? Are there any behaviors or addictions in your life that share all five of these markers?
3. On page 30, May addresses idolatry. Have you ever thought of idolatry in this context? Do you agree or disagree with May's opinion? Why or why not?
 4. What are your aversions or repulsions? What is your opinion about aversion addictions? Are they as dangerous as attraction addictions?

CHAPTER 3: MIND: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE OF ADDICTION

1. At the beginning of Chapter 3, May writes, "When we fail at managing ourselves, we feel defective." Have you ever felt this way? How often? Can you imagine seeing it as a positive?
2. Do you have a difficult time meditating or praying? Why or why not?
3. On page 54, May calls the term "addictive personality" a myth. Have you heard or used this term before? Do you agree with May that it is indeed a myth? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever felt that you were your own enemy? How did you deal with it? Do you see any possible ways of making what is seemingly a negative feeling or experience into a positive or learning experience?

CHAPTER 4: BODY: THE NEUROLOGICAL NATURE OF ADDICTION

1. Chapter 4 addresses the body, the brain, and the science behind addiction. Has studying the brain chemistry of our bodies helped you understand your addictive behaviors? In what way?
2. On page 83, May writes about biological signals and stressors that we feel when weaning off of both substance and nonsubstance addictions. Have you ever felt these stressors when trying to quit either a substance or a behavior? How did you deal with it? Did you successfully quit?
3. Do you see addiction differently after this multisystem explanation? How will this information change the way you approach addiction in your own life?

CHAPTER 5: SPIRIT: THE THEOLOGICAL NATURE OF ADDICTION

1. In Chapter 5, May writes, “Ultimately, our yearning for God is the most important aspect of our humanity, our most precious treasure; it gives our existence meaning and direction.” Do you agree with this statement? If not, what do you believe to be the most important aspect of humanity?
2. In May’s opinion, God creates us with a propensity for addiction. If you agree with this statement, why do you think God would create us this way? What is the purpose of addiction?

3. Have you ever hit “rock bottom?” If so, are you comfortable sharing your story? If not, what do you imagine your rock bottom would be? What would you have to lose in order to feel that you’ve lost everything?
4. Do you feel that the “homeward pull” May describes on page 98 is attainable? Is it something you will strive for? Why or why not?
5. How do you perceive your role in the world? What is your image of yourself? Have you ever felt a moment of pause in your self-definition, which May describes as “spiritual” or “intuitive” (p. 101)? If so, what was your experience like? What did it mean to you?
6. Do you believe that addiction is tied to evil or to Satan? If so, how have you seen this manifested in your life or the life of a loved one?

CHAPTER 6: GRACE: THE QUALITIES OF MERCY

1. In the beginning of Chapter 6, May expresses qualities of grace through a series of images. What are some images of grace that apply to your life—in art, music, or even your own metaphors?
2. What “risks of faith” have you taken in your life? What was the outcome?
3. In your life what has been your own personal “desert sojourn” or “journey through the wilderness of temptation?”

4. On page 135, May states: “If our motivations are primarily utilitarian . . . deprivation may consist only of the denial of one specific object of attachment: trying to do without so much food, trying to give up tobacco, and so on. With major addictions or more conscious spiritual motivations, the desert can grow to encompass all of life.” Have you battled addiction in an all-encompassing way or in a primarily utilitarian way? Which do you think is more effective?

CHAPTER 7: EMPOWERMENT: GRACE AND WILL IN OVERCOMING ADDICTION

1. What were your preconceptions of asceticism before reading May’s explanation in Chapter 7? Do you think it is a realistic option?
2. Have you or anyone you know ever fallen into the substitute addiction trap? Describe the situation. How did it affect your life?
3. Have you experienced a moment of deliverance in your life? Did it change your course? Why or why not?
4. In the “Assent” portion of Chapter 7, May writes, “Is it possible that the heart can begin an act of consecration while the mind is still wondering what it is all about? By the grace of God, the answer is yes.” Do you agree with this statement? Have you seen this at work in your own life or in the life of a loved one?

CHAPTER 8: HOMECOMING: DISCERNMENT AND THE CONSECRATED LIFE

1. When you pray the Lord's Prayer, are you present in the words or do you say them out of habit—something to fill the void? Is there anything wrong with prayer as habit?
2. Have you ever truly been able to see yourself through another's eyes? If so, what was that moment like for you? If not, is this something you desire to experience or would you rather avoid it?
3. Have your addictive behaviors ever hurt anyone? Who and in what ways?
4. At the end of *Addiction & Grace*, May writes, "If God indeed creates us in love, of love, and for love, then we are meant for a life of joy and freedom, not endless suffering and pain. But if God also creates us with an inborn longing for God, then human life is also meant to contain yearning, incompleteness, and lack of fulfillment." Do you agree? Does this dichotomy give you hope or does it leave you hopeless? What feeling do you walk away from this book with? Do you believe *Addiction & Grace* has changed you in any profound way? If so, how?