



## Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions

*Gerald G. May*

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## **Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions** Gerald G. May

Addiction and Grace offers an inspiring and hope-filled vision for those who desire to explore the mystery of who and what they really are. May examines the "processes of attachment" that lead to addiction and describes the relationship between addiction and spiritual awareness. He also details the various addictions from which we can suffer, not only to substances like alcohol and drugs, but to work, sex, performance, responsibility, and intimacy.

Drawing on his experience as a psychiatrist working with the chemically dependent, May emphasizes that addiction represents an attempt to assert complete control over our lives. Addiction and Grace is a compassionate and wise treatment of a topic of major concern in these most addictive of times, one that can provide a critical yet hopeful guide to a place of freedom based on contemplative spirituality.

## **Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions Details**

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## **From Reader Review Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions for online ebook**

### **Tyra says**

This book has been a nice surprise. I thought, at first, that it might be about hard-core addictions and how to overcome them through Christ. Instead, it is about any addiction, large or small. The author, Gerald May, claims that we all are addicted. He says that anything that steals life from us and causes us to make illogical or hasty decisions is our addiction. This could be "hard-core" like drugs or subtle like relationships. I have found it extremely helpful.

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### **Doug says**

I found this to be a penetrating, insightful, challenging and encouraging, grace-filled work especially in the closing chapters. This book really hit home in many ways as I confronted "the addict in me" and considered the addictions or intemperate attachments all of us face in one way or another. and yet God loves us in the midst of our addictions, uses them to bring us grace and repentance.

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### **Christopher Lewis Kozoriz says**

Grace is the most powerful force in the universe. It can transcend repression, addiction, and every other internal or external power that seeks to oppress the freedom of the human heart. Grace is where our hope lies. ~ Gerald G. May, "Addiction & Grace", page 5)

I only read this book halfway and have decided not to read further. I was not connecting to this book and I actually thought it was a real waste of time. The author has a philosophy that is kind of confusing. His main point is that of having grace throughout our addictions. The confusing part of his philosophy is that he does not really share with his audience where this grace comes from. He mentions Buddha, Christ and all sorts of religions and tries to imply that grace can come from any source. I tend to disagree. I believe that grace comes from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins can only come from Christ, as he is the one who paid the price by dying on the cross for our forgiveness.

To me this book is not biblically sound and is trying to appeal to too many people, maybe as to sell more copies. The title is deceptive.

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### **Magdelanye says**

This is another one of those books that give so much difficulty, not that they are particularly hard to read, but they just cause so much difficulty in all areas. Take the ratings system, for instance. Its inadquacy to come close to reflecting a gut opinion renders the system way less than useful. In fact it barely gives a clue as the books impact. With such a limited range, gross generalization

There is some important observations in this book, and there were even a few times I loved it. Therefore, because it was better than average but not earth shattering, I am coerced in giving it a 4 out of 5 when I would say it was a 7 out of 10 or a 5 out of 7 (my preferred system)

Maybe before I go any farther I should confess.

I bought the book because it was highly recommended, and I liked the title.

But to my dismay, I could never quite get past the first chapter. I did enough scattered reading to decide I wanted to put it on my return later pile but it took at least half a dozen more attempts to make a dent into the material.

Now that I have read the whole thing, about 4 years after my last attempt, I am not sure that I quite yet get it.

I have some notes I made which when I have on hand I will elaborate on.

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### **David W. Sandel says**

The overused but still useful word “addiction” comes from the 16th century Latin noun *addictio*, which means “a giving over or surrender.” Not the good surrender, but the bad one, a giving over to something or someone that will then control me and eventually ruin me.

We think of addicts as being on the way to ruin. They might be very dangerous, and certainly not in control of themselves. They are ... not us. We are not addicts; someone else is.

Some “addictions” seem good; can’t you be “addicted” to God? Can’t you feel compelled to do good works and bring blessing to the people in your life?

God loves us, but God hates our addictions. God loves me the sinner, but God hates the sin. And addiction is certainly sin.

Some of us, although certainly not me, have “addictive personalities.” They (not me, mind you) are weak and prone to that “giving over” to alcohol, or stress, or video games, or pornography, or gossip, or some other awful thing. We should watch out for them.

These questionable assertions about addiction are addressed by Dr. Gerald May in this bestselling book. It’s been republished with a new introduction and two short articles published a few years after the book was originally published in 1988. Gerald May was a distinguished psychiatrist who worked and taught and wrote as a faculty member of the Shalem School of Spiritual Direction for 30 plus years before he died of cancer in 2005.

Dr. May is a poet and a philosopher. He is a Christian and sometimes sounds like a mystic. At the same time he is precise in his understanding and description of the mental and physical nature of addiction. Although this book was written just as the river of new information about how the brain works began to really flow, it describes much more of the physical nature of attachment and addiction than most of us know, and in a way that is both detailed and non-technical.

Actually, most of us don't have a clue about addiction, because we've heard so much on TV and read so many flash-in-the-pan stories of both truth and fiction. This kind of non-helpful "information" barrage makes us think we know, when we don't.

Some of my best friends are addicts. But, Gerald May makes it clear, that's not surprising. I'm an addict too. So is he. Early in the book May compiles a list of attraction addictions (what we want) and aversion addictions (what we avoid). He says in one of his many charming personal asides, "If it is any consolation, I am addicted to at least fourteen of the listed items, and I could add several others if I wanted to be completely candid. Which I do not."

If you find time to read this book (as I did not ... even as a Christian counselor, even as one who works regularly with folks in great pain because of their addictions, even though I had heard over and over for years how good a book this was ... until I was assigned it as required reading for a class), you will discover the *seamy* side of yourself. Rather, you'll have to acknowledge the *seamy* side of yourself that you probably already know all too well.

And, thank God, you will also discover the glorious and unconditioned nature of God's grace for you. *Seamy* side and all.

Take it or leave it.

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### **Benjamin Vineyard says**

A great read about the depths of addiction. It's a simple, accessible read, but at times felt a little drawn - parts I wasn't finding much meaning in, though another may.

The author's writing is simple and approachable. Wisdom comes best this way, I think.

My big take away was hearing how all people are addicted to something, perhaps many things. Just ask yourself to stop something, and if you can't, you'll be face to face with addiction. (They're not all about drugs and alcohol, that is.) To hear the mechanics of addiction from a spiritual, psychological, and physiological perspective was intriguing. I saw how these things would work in my life, have worked in my life.

This one will be a book to hand to others, if the topic comes up. It could even be a good study for spiritual life groups.

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### **Becca Rodgers says**

this book was a beautiful read on the nature of addictions and God's miraculous grace. i especially loved chapter 7.

here are just a few memorable quotes:

Detachment is the word used in spiritual traditions to describe freedom of desire. Not freedom from desire,

but freedom of desire. ... For centuries, people have distorted its meaning, mistakenly assuming that detachment devalues desire and denies the potential goodness of the things and people to which one can become attached. ... An authentic spiritual understanding of detachment devalues neither desire nor the objects of desire. Instead, it "aims at correcting one's own anxious grasping in order to free oneself for committed relationship to God. " According to Meister Eckhart, detachment "enkindles the heart, awakens the spirit, stimulates our longings, and shows us where God is ... "

Grace is our only hope for dealing with addiction, the only power that can truly vanquish its destructiveness. Grace is the invincible advocate of freedom and the absolute expression of perfect love.

... our incompleteness is the empty side of our longing for God and for love. It is what draws us toward God and one another.

From a more specifically spiritual viewpoint, we naturally seek the least threatening ways of trying to satisfy our longing for God, ways that protect our sense of personal power and require the least sacrifice. Even when we know that our hunger is for God alone, we will still be looking for loopholes - ... ways of maintaining our attachments to things and people while simultaneously trying to deepen our intimacy with God. We seek compromise ... because of the way that we are made; we naturally look for the least painful ways of living.

The structures of religion are meant to mediate God's self-revelation through community; they are not meant to be substitute gods.

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### **Maria says**

What a fabulous book. A cornerstone principle of May's is that human beings were never meant to be completely satisfied in this life.

May asserts that most people are addicted to something, be it a substance, process, self-concept, or any combination of those.

May contends that the forces of the world bind and frustrate us, holding us captive to form and substance, but that the heart will be restless until it rests in God.

I've read similar books on this topic with a less Christian perspective, and I'd initially (somewhat haughtily) thought that some intellectual gravitas might be missing on some level from this book, but found that not to be so.

At any rate, May does a good job discussing spiritual asceticism, grace, and ego issues. (As an interesting side note, he's cognizant of the latter in his own writing: he intersperses his philosophical/theological questions with admissions of being concerned with how his book might be received by his colleagues - which I found endearing.)

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### **Sarah says**

I'm not quite sure how to describe this book, except to say that it is eye-opening and potentially life-altering.

Yes, dear Reformed, Theology-Loving Reader, there are parts where you will disagree with May. There are times where I wrote "Really??" in the margins of my copy. There are places where he flirts with syncretism. But if you get past it (and really...read someone who is outside of your theological wing!), you'll find truth that your heart so desperately needs to hear.

You are addicted...and while others would call this idolatry, May makes it clear that the roots of this problem are not simply disentangled by sheer willpower or repentance. They require an act of mercy, particularly because on a cellular level we are, indeed, addicted.

This isn't an easy read, for a thousand reasons, but it is definitely worth reading. Do it, please.

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### **Shelley says**

I have a family member struggling with addiction and spend a lot of time looking for resources to grow my knowledge of the problem. I had seen this book before but always seemed to grab something else. After spending some time in a Recovery Bible I had recently purchased, I noted that many of the daily devotionals that really grabbed me were written by Dr. Gerald May. I finally made the connection and purchased this book. The most fascinating part of the book was learning about the psychological and physiological way the brain functions and how addiction forms both in the mind and the brain. I also liked that he didn't focus on just chemical dependency, or eating disorders, etc. Throughout the book, he connects that we are all addicted to something. Many of the illustrations are with chemical dependency since that is such an easy connection for most of us. I would recommend this book to anyone dealing with a loved one struggling with addiction. I'm a little cautious about recommending it for an addict, unless they are in recovery and have their "sound mind" back because you do have to give your reading time complete attention on certain parts. Lastly, thanks be to God for the grace he extends to me everyday and for Dr. May for reminding me of that.

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### **Glen Grunau says**

In the past few years, I have become especially aware of the strength of the numerous attachments in my life that displace the object of my most deep, true desire. According to May, we all have addicted (not addictive) personalities. I particularly appreciated the honesty of an author so willing to admit to his own many attachments, including his attachment to precision. I have not heard a word before that so well captures one of my life-long addictions!

I appreciated his teaching on the natural human tendency to simply substitute one attachment for another when we seek to gain freedom from our addictions. I was persuaded by May that the only place of freedom from false attachments is the place that I often so frequently avoid - the place of spaciousness. It is that place of deep inner longing, emptiness, incompleteness and lack of fulfillment that seems so abhorrent to me. Yet this is the emptiness that we require if we are to truly meet God and receive his love. Because God will not vigorously compete with our other attachments. He gently and humbly waits for our invitation to enter our emptiness, our place of deepest longing.

May's assertion is that "In our society, we have come to believe that discomfort always means that something is wrong. We are conditioned to believe that feelings of distress, pain, deprivation, yearning, and longing mean something is wrong with the way we are living our lives. Conversely, we are convinced that a rightly

lived life must give us serenity, completion, and fulfillment . . . The influence of such convictions is stifling to the human spirit. Individually and collectively, we must somehow recover the truth. The truth is, we were never meant to be completely satisfied".

When I first heard the words from the old U2 song "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" I thought at that time (O God, how could I be so naive at 28 years of age!) that Bono could not truly be a Christian if he had not "found it". Now I look to the prophets in our generation like Bono and Bruce Cockburn who have spoken truth to the church from outside of the church . . . and I am paying closer attention. We were all convinced then that we had "found it" (and we were all displaying this on our bumper stickers in the 70s?).

May was able to help me grasp the deep truth that it is my aversion to this emptiness which gives power to all of my addictions and the substitute attachments in my life. The one word I will take away from this book is "spaciousness". My challenge is to always make room for spaciousness in my life, to give room for my unfulfilled, deepest yearnings which can only be satisfied (and yet never completely) by "God's love (which) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

PS A few days after completing this book, I was drawn to this passage in Psalm 66:8-12 which summarizes so well how God has used the purification of suffering in my life to continue the process of freeing me from attachments and bring me out "to a spacious place".

Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

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### **Wil Roese says**

This book covers the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of addiction. The chapters on the physical and psychological aspects of addiction are excellent. The chapters on the spiritual aspect of addiction lacked a unifying systematic theology and at times seem rambling. The book ends with some good advice on overcoming addiction including not making addictions more complicated than they need to be, and living with the longing that is within all of us.

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### **Julie says**

This is a book I need to read over and over in order to absorb all it has to offer. May's kindness and in-depth understanding emanate from the pages and I often find just what I need to read. May has a personal relationship with his god, but even so, he writes broadly enough to encompass my more mystery-oriented approach to spirituality and the meaning of life. I will return to this book often.

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### **Adil says**

This was an interesting and unique book for me. In earlier parts, the book examines the physical (neural, etc.) aspects of addiction and does this well (it is not boring, too technical, or too fluffy). I've had a chance to

think carefully about my own addiction to stress and I did encounter some quite insightful comments that have potential to explain some of my interesting experiences.

Most of the latter half is devoted to the role of concepts like grace, consecration, etc. in overcoming addiction. I am not a Christian and did not grow up in a culture that exposed me to any Christian beliefs, so I cannot speak to the use of these concepts. I can only comment on the general tone of the book. I liked it, because the author is very down to earth and humble. He talks about some of his own addictions and failures to overcome them at times. He acknowledges that overcoming addiction does not involve going through a checklist and explores its mysterious aspects (e.g., sudden breakthroughs to freedom). For instance, he emphasizes his conviction that one cannot overcome strong addictions by oneself (i.e., the importance of (a spiritual) community). He does not reach sweeping conclusions and does not simplify matters for the sake of satisfying readers who seek a more structured world. So it is not really a self-help book. It's more an exposition of his personal philosophy and spirituality. His language is beautiful and elegant. He is somebody I would have liked to meet (he's deceased however).

As much as I cannot fully appreciate the central Christian concepts here, such as grace and consecration, I do think this book is worth reading for all.

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### **Doug says**

This book lacks a coherent thesis throughout. The author states he is a psychiatrist and not a theologian. Some sections deal just with the technical aspects of addiction. Others talk about Christian scripture in ways that make it hard to define the theological perspective. May also talks about addiction as if it relates to all forms of habitual behavior. Addiction is defined very broadly. One page has a chart of things someone may be addicted to such as: ice cream, pizza, furniture, etc. I would not put these things in the same category as chemical dependency to nicotine or alcohol. I think this book would be confusing and unhelpful for anyone struggling with an addiction more serious than nail biting.

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