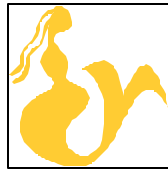

The Barnabas Letter

Volume 1, Issue 1

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Addiction

IS WORSHIP
TURNED UPSIDE DOWN



.... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.
Romans 1

"Spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The objects of our addictions become our false gods. These are what we worship, what we attend to, where we give our time and energy, instead of love. Addiction, then, displaces and supplants God's love as the source and object of our deepest true desire. It is, as one modern spiritual writer has called it, a "counterfeit of religious presence."

Gerald May, Addiction and Grace

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The Lie That Loved Me

How Self-Deception Fuels Addiction

Roger Edwards

Where did you get that?" my older brother asked me.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and our family was on the way home from my cousin's house. Mom and Dad were in the front seat and my brother, sister and I were in the back. My brother noticed that I was playing with a small toy battleship. Never having seen it before, he asked me about it. The question was more pointed than he knew.

The fact was that I had stolen it. While playing with my cousin, in a moment when he wasn't looking, I had stuffed it into my pocket until safely away in the car. I hesitated for a brief uncomfortable moment and then blatantly answered, "Jan (my cousin) gave it to me,"

My lie rose and hovered in the air between us, trembling like a soap bubble. It seemed I was in that bubble, and that my life depended on it. I didn't know if it would burst or maintain itself. My brother searched my face, shrugged, and then went back to staring out the window. The lie had apparently worked; the bubble had held. But I found that life inside of a bubble takes constant maintenance.

Not wanting any more questions, I shoved the ship back into my pocket. But hiding the evidence didn't end the discomfort. And so I set to work to eradicate my troublesome feelings. I had not liked the way my brother had looked at me, and now I did not like the way I saw myself. I had convinced my brother to look away, perhaps now I could convince myself to do the same.

"He probably would've given it to me if I had asked him too" I thought. *"It wasn't like I just took it since he would've probably...."*

The shame didn't withdraw or advance, it just stood there, looking at me. *"Besides he's got tons of them, he won't even miss it, so there was no harm done."* There, that seemed better. That one had a lot of truth to it. *"Yeah... he's got lots of them, and he doesn't even play with them that much, I don't think."*

"So it really doesn't matter." I said to myself, *"What I told my brother was the best thing. He wouldn't understand how it really was, so that was just the simplest way to explain it."* I

repeated it to myself, *"...yeah, that was just the best thing to do..."*

The situation was becoming more tolerable. I had somehow broken the hold of the shame and guilt. It was an eerie relief to gain a right feeling by doing something I knew was wrong. I had found a new toy, the dangerous plaything of self-deception. It was a point of crossing in my life.

It would seem that 'self-deception' is an oxymoron. How can you not know something you know? How can you consciously choose to become unconscious? Yet somehow people have the incredible ability to do this very thing. It is what the Bible calls 'suppressing the truth'. Suppression appears to be very common, (for even little boys can do it), but it is also very diabolical (for the father of lies originated it). The abandonment of truth and the art of self-deception are the roots of idolatry, and in that vein, the root of all addictions.

I was one boy trying to live in two worlds. One world was what I knew to be true; the other was a pretend world that I had created. And, as the supreme being of my pretend world, it also fell to me to be its sustainer. Now, upholding an alternate reality is an awful responsibility, too large for a young boy's soul. But I tried.

Just how does one sustain a lie? Why, by lying more. You maintain one lie by manufacturing other lies to support the first one. When God made the real world; He spoke it into being, and then He rested. When we speak a pretend world, we must talk endlessly, lest it dissolve.

People caught up in addictions are like people living in a self-created bubble. Addictions are fundamentally built on a lie, and then sustained by ever increasing complexities of lies. The first lie is that there can be something to replace God. The other lies function to keep the first one afloat.

Consider the common addiction to food. Available and immediately pleasurable, food is an obvious choice for idolatry/addiction. And it is an easy one to lie about. *"We all need food to live so how can you be addicted to it?"*

But the lie that fuels addictive eating

How can you not know something you know? How can you consciously choose to become unconscious? It is called 'suppressing the truth'.

"The abandonment of truth and the art of self-deception are the roots of idolatry, and in that vein, the root of all addictions."



(whether or not you are overweight) goes like this: 'Since we don't feel fulfilled, then God must not be enough. Therefore, there must be a supplement.' Food is merely a handy choice. It is a low god to be sure, but we willingly exchange the glory of a high god for the mere availability and reliability of a low one.

The first lie (God can be replaced or supplemented) is then supported by a host of other untruthful thoughts. This secondary lie (*'a doughnut will help my heart feel full'*), is then covered with supporting lies (*'I don't really know I am eating this', 'After all, I am still hungry', etc*), and can finally culminate in a deceptive way of living (sneaking food, hoarding, compulsive exercise, etc).

The deeper you are in the bubble, the more you have to stay away from truthful feedback, mirrors, or social gatherings lest the little pins of reality pop the illusion. At first specific truth is threatening, then general truth, then all truth, until you live only in the illusion itself. This flight from truth often culminates in disaster as evidenced in the crashing end of the severe additions; alcohol, drug, etc. Addictions begin with a lie, grow by a lie; but they end, inevitably and often abruptly, in the truth.

Deceit Destroys Joy

Do you want to know if you are in a spiral of deceit? I have a diagnostic test that will help you determine if you are dabbling with self-deception. Look carefully at your capacity to enjoy. I would argue that if your ability to enjoy is growing smaller then self-deceit is growing larger. There is a connection between joy and the capacity for truth. Here is what I mean.

It really isn't possible, to enjoy the third doughnut, because in the act of trying to satisfy a spiritual stomach by engorging your physical one, you overdo what the body can assimilate. What you began by tasting, you end merely gnawing, and thus God's gift of eating becomes a futile and even profane act.

It is this way with all inordinate loves. The pornographer, in his chase of glossy or digital flesh, loses the memory for the real warmth of touch. The workaholic drives completely over the pleasure of accomplishment. The possessive mother forfeits the joy of raising children because she cannot bear to let them rise. Addicts can't savor the joy of a modest mouthful because they are obsessed on 'getting it down' in order to access the next forkful.

The self-deceived cannot have true enjoyment simply because they have left the world of the true. Could it be that your diminishing joy in a child, or kindness, or prayer is symptomatic of your abandonment of the true moral world of

responsibility, virtue, and the spiritual?

Are you deceiving yourself about your aging, your disappointments, your accomplishments? Do you 'fib' about your failures? Do you excuse or obfuscate your lack of love or obedience? These choices are not without consequences. A conscience seared so as to cover a present guilt, cannot then be alive to enjoy the eternal good, or its earthy derivatives such as children, accomplishments, or friendships.

In the case of the stolen battleship, I was traveling this downward spiral, away from worship and into an addiction cycle. I crossed into lust, envy, idolatry, and larceny. Since it was a Sunday, I broke all of the commandments except perhaps adultery. It was a pact with the devil.

Note my progression. My initial appreciation of the battleship was probably healthy. But the next step of sacrificing my integrity for it was perverse. Moreover, I found out that my initial 'selling out' was only the down payment. In order to keep the ship, I had to sell off more and more of my integrity to keep up the installment plan. I first deceived my cousin, then deceived my brother, and then entered the never-ending cycle of defrauding myself. My birthright possession, a conscience that (at least vaguely) points towards joy, was sold for a bowl of plastic porridge. I had acquired a battleship, but I lost the captain.

The loss of joy occurs because addiction and self-deception make us hollow men. We perhaps gain the world, but we lose our soul.

Worship and Addiction

Addiction is worship turned upside down. It is a blatant lie that says that God can be replaced with a created thing. Addiction is the worship of the low.

This is the progression of fallen man. From a knowledge of glory, that could free us to become the image-bearers of God; fallen man foolishly chases imitations. It is a foolishness that herds us like cattle and finally consumes us. Addiction takes us down and in, and in the process we become a small black hole, where no light escapes.

Worship is the addiction to the High. It leads us up and out of ourselves. 'He who loses his life for my sake will find it.' Jesus said. We become lights, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Self deceit fuels addiction. Truth is the fuel for worship. The antidote to addiction (or false worship) is true worship. And true worship comes from simply from telling the truth.



"I had acquired a battleship, but I lost the captain."

"It is this way with all inordinate loves. The pornographer, in his chase of glossy or digital flesh, loses the capacity for the real warmth of touch. The workaholic drives completely over the pleasure of accomplishment. The possessive mother forfeits the joy of raising children because she cannot bear to let them rise."



Bored Women?

By Jan Meyers



Why are we are far more
 “disciplined” than we are at
 rest, far more “committed”
 than winsome, far more
 “nice” than passionate, far
 more “dutiful” than free?
 And why are we more weary
 than filled with hope, and far
 more committed to dulling
 our senses (addicted)
 than worshipful?

Ever think of your life as boring? You’re probably laughing at the prospect - you can’t remember a day in the last year when you were bored. But in actuality, boredom – let’s define boredom here as anything we do to dull our senses - is one of the greatest enemies of the female heart, and we seek it out in our addictions. As women, our addictions reveal that we prefer a chosen boredom (dulling our senses) to being awakened, to being responsive, to our true desire.

“Bored? How can I possibly be bored?” you might ask. Our schedules are so packed and our hours filled with so much stimulus, it’s hard to imagine life being boring. We may feel burned-out and haggard, but surely we aren’t bored, right? Helen Keller said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” Somehow I don’t think she had shopping, shrouded shots of vodka, hidden hits of the drug ecstasy or emotional affairs in mind when she envisioned a daring adventure. So hang with me here. Life is not boring – we *make it* boring. Let me explain.

Think back for a moment to a time when you were a daydreaming little girl (if you cannot think of this for yourself, try to imagine her):

The carpet feels warm underneath the dining room table as she lazily rolls over. Her six-year-old eyes take in the dust specks floating through the sun streaming from the window to her little refuge. She is completely at rest, her mind freely wandering from a conversation with a neighborhood kitten to dreams of her birthday party. Her heart is a vast open place of dreaming of knights and princes, horses and castles, lakes and sunshine, laughter and love. Her senses remember favorite meadows, bareback horse rides, velvet dresses, willow tree branches. She hums a tune as she envisions her hero – she can see herself completely abandoned to the pursuit of the knight who comes to release her from her castle. She feels beautiful as she dreams and waits for him.

away on an arcade video game. See what happens? Now she is moving and receiving constant stimulus...but her soul is not being awakened. In the same way, we dull our mind and hearts by filling them with things that don’t stimulate our desire. Oh, these things stimulate our bodies, our fantasies, our minds and pulse, but they do not stimulate our desire – the deepest place of longing for God’s love.

How do some women carry a winsome spirit into their adult years despite jolts and disappointment, abuse and harm? How do they remain open and responsive without dulling their hearts through the boredom of addiction? We all have an echo of the winsomeness of that little girl - why is this echo not resounding, increasing, expanding in the hearts of women who know the love of Christ? Why are we far more “disciplined” than we are at rest, far more “committed” than winsome, far more “nice” than passionate, far more “dutiful” than free? And why are we more weary than filled with hope, and far more committed to dulling our senses (addicted) than worshipful?

John Piper says in the forward to his book *A Hunger for God*, “If you don’t feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk too deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. God did not create you for this. There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened.” Boredom keeps us from being awakened. Boredom is the perfect place for getting fat, having an affair, getting more parts of your body pierced, getting skinny, trying cocaine, maxing out a credit card, pouring yourself more devotedly into your schedule of ministry, devouring some romance novels, developing some great networks of gos-



dependent relationship, discovering pornography web sites. Why? Because there's nothing else to do? No, because we are running from the depth of our desire. We're running from being awakened. C.S. Lewis said the problem with most Christians is that *they don't want enough*. Again, how can that be, we ask. How can it be that I want too *little* when I feel wanton and frivolous for wanting at all? But if we are honest, we can easily see the truth in Lewis' familiar words, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

My closet is obscene. Since I was a teenager it has been a picture of my tendencies toward excess. I could probably clothe a small country in Asia with the multiple shirts, sweaters, shoes. So my problem is one of not wanting enough? Sounds backward, doesn't it? If someone asked you to describe a fine meal that

would arouse your senses, it's not likely your picture would include mass quantities of peanut butter cups. That's like fantasizing about an affair with Pee Wee Herman when we could have a romance with Mel Gibson. Surely our imagination has more finesse than this. So why do we run headlong into the boredom of such indulgence. What is going on inside us when dulling ourselves in the boredom of a bag of chips or TV seems so much more *bearable* than being stirred by our imagination and hope for more.

Manna and Maggots

It's not a new phenomena. The Israelites had manna – flaky honey cakes covering the ground every morning - and

was manna *from heaven*. It was designed to be just enough. It was given to arouse the hearts of the ones who ate it to remember that there was a place coming, Canaan, just over the horizon. The honey-cakes called them to remember God and to trust his care and provision. It was meant to cause them to hunger for what was coming down the road. Without his every day manna in our lives, and without our hearts gathering it in, we simply forget what it is we are hungry for.

Down the road was a place flowing with milk *and* honey – a place of lavish pleasure, great beauty and fulfilling work - not just whispers of honey-cakes. Here was a taste...coming was the real deal. Manna consistently intrudes into our hours on the freeway and frenzied pace. The question becomes – will we allow ourselves to be stirred? A translucent flower, a handmade tapestry, a photograph of a child, a pot of homemade stew on a snowy night, a quiet, contemplative time of prayer, jolting lyrics, an extravagant and sensual wedding party, an engaged argument with your spouse

that leads to more intimacy. These are our whispers of honey-cakes. The real deal is coming.

When the Israelites attempted to hoard the manna, maggots grew in their stash overnight. We just don't like what those small, sustaining tastes stir in us, do we? So we try to control things - we run to excess. We hoard manna and find peanut butter cups (not one but six). We flee manna's simplicity and grab a J&B bottle and gulp rather than sip it with a sunset. We hoard manna and seek out the woman who seems to really need us, she's so fragile and we have so much strength to give her. She tells us everything, nothing held back. We reject manna and become *necessary* to her.

We hoard manna and pick up the



"These are our whispers of honey-cakes. The real deal is coming."

The daily challenge for me, in the midst of a lengthy season of loss and uncertainty, has been to stay awake to my desires – to not flee to crafted places of control like food, worry, or fantasy.

What is going on inside us when dulling ourselves in the boredom of a bag of chips or TV seems so much more *bearable* than being stirred by our imagination and hope for more.

(Continued on page 7)



Cyber-Addiction

How We Are Paying For Our View— by John Pierce



A Too- Common Story:

10:30 PM. *"Honey, I am going to check my email quickly before I come to bed, you go on without me; I will be up as soon as I get done...it shouldn't be long." She thinks to herself "yea, right, there is no such thing as real quick, in your case!" She responds "well goodnight then..." He listened to the silence, and paused with guilt only long enough to be caught up in the music of his excited fantasy and the call of his other lover. He listened to make sure she was upstairs and in place. Then, of course, you can hear it...the door closing...the sound of the modem dialing and creating the relationship...He waits impatiently and stares, absorbed by what he anticipates...Click...you hear the chattering of the keys rattling off his private login name and password...his heart rate quickens and then you hear it..." you have 10 new messages"... "wow", he thinks "I wonder if she wrote again?" Click... Wait-Stare-Read-Stare... "Nope" Click... Wait-Stare-Read-Stare... Click, Click. Then, " Hmm, that link looks good..." Click... Wait-Stare, Click, Stare, Stare, Stare - Read - Stare - Gawk - Stare, Click, Stare...Click...POP...the message sends him reeling back in the chair..."Hi Steve, remember me?"*

3:30 A.M., he sneaks quietly into their room-heart beating-for fear she will ask him what he has been doing and he will have to weave another dark strand into blanket of lies. He thinks, "it was very wild - thrilling nothing we do is like that, but I feel so bad; I cannot do that again. I love my family, I love my wife, I think..."

but deep down he knows he will go there again. He gently lifts the covers, so as not to awaken her and climbs into bed. She breathes deeply, rhythmically to make him think she is soundly asleep, but her heart sinks in fear and dread as she thinks, " something does not feel right with us...with this, but I know if I ask him where he has been, he is going say he has been working...what do I ask, do I just for get it and shake it off once again or do I trust my intuition? Oh God, help me know what to do!"

Sadly, too many of you know a version of this story from acquaintances or friends. And perhaps many of you have said the words "Honey, I am going to check my email quickly..." or at least you had the best of intentions and just could not pull yourself away. Hours later, dazed and mesmerized, you look at the reality ticking on the wall and are shaken to think a few minutes has become hours. "How could it be that I spent so many hours here?"

There is something that is incredibly drawing, soothing, arousing, relaxing, enticing, and a thousand other words, about the places you can explore on that webbed window to the world. What an incredible tool the web has become and what better way to pursue very legitimate interests and business. But with anything new there are risks and unknowns. Millions are embracing the Internet every year. It is estimated by IntelliQuest Information Group, Inc. of Austin, Texas, that 83 million Americans are currently online with that number expected to grow by 12 million in the next year alone. Many new and even long-term users are not aware of some of the things that are occurring on the Net. Did you know:

- In the largest study to date-an ABC News survey of more than 17,000 people last year-psychologist David Greenfield found that 6 percent of Web users, about 6 million Americans, could be addicted.
- And from the same study: "One in 100 Netizens is seriously hooked on erotica sites or X-rated chat rooms, he said. This severely addicted group - which Cooper dubbed the "cybersex compulsives" - is characterized by both spending more than 11 hours a week on sex sites and scoring highly on a standard psychological scale of sexually compulsive behavior.

While 1 percent may not seem like a significant figure, Cooper pointed out that it represents some 200,000 people given that 20 million people visit sex sites each month. Plus, the true number of Cybersex Compulsives is probably much higher, he said, given that addicts often tend to be in denial.

- According to Nielsen NetRatings, 17.5 million surfers visited porn sites from their homes in January of 2000, a 40 percent increase compared with four months earlier.
- According to a recent national study by the Crimes Against Children Research Center, Approximately one in five youth between the ages of 10 and 17 received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet in the last year.

Five Types of Internet Addiction

Cybersexual Addiction	Compulsive use of adult web sites for cybersex and cyberporn.
Cyber-relationship Addiction	Over-involvement in online relationships.
Net Compulsions	Obsessive online gambling, shopping, or online trading.
Information Overload	Compulsive web surfing or database searches.
Computer Addiction	Obsessive computer game playing (e.g., Doom, Myst, or Solitaire).

From Cyber-Disorders: The Mental Health Concern for the New Millennium by Kimberly Young, Molly Pistner, James O'Mara, and Jennifer Buchanan



(Continued from page 6)

- In that same study, One in thirty-three received and aggressive sexual solicitation – a solicitor who asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; sent them regular e-mail, money, or gifts.
- Again from the same study, One in four had an unwanted exposure to pictures of naked people or people having sex in the last year.
- Did you know that roughly one in five couples who come to Barnabas, are in the recovery stages from an affair beginning through an online acquaintance?

Now the purpose of sharing some of these statistics is not to turn you away from the use of the Internet, rather it is to raise the awareness that the Internet is a community that requires our thoughtful engagement. So many folks we talk to at Barnabas get to places in their lives that they never thought they would. Who would think that a simple e-mail check that should take 10 minutes could end four or five ours later in shame?

If you think you or someone you love has a problem with the Internet, read through the questions below. If you affirm five or more as being true for you, it might be time to take a closer look.

Are You Addicted to the Internet?

The following eight-item questionnaire was developed by Dr. Patricia Young (1996), author of *Caught in the Net*.

1. Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet (think about previous on-line activity or anticipate next on-line session)?
2. Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?
3. Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use?
4. Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?
5. Do you stay on-line longer than originally intended?
6. Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of significant relationship, job, and educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?
7. Have you lied to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?
8. Do you uses the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

(Continued from page 5)

phone and have countless hours of conversation about someone else, all the while telling ourselves its important to think through their life because we *care* so much. We reject manna and find a few solitary hours and spend it with illicit web sites and masturbation. We flee manna and volunteer for four committees as opposed to last year's two. We watch *Days of Our Lives*. We host another Christian social event without our heart being involved. We become 'women who love too much.'

The daily challenge for me, in the midst of a lengthy season of loss and uncertainty, has been to stay awake to my desires – to not flee to crafted places of control like food, worry, or fantasy. One morning in Colorado I awoke with a piercing awareness that I didn't have any children begging me to make waffles. I was alone. I was tempted, for that moment, to dull my senses (through 'getting busy,' fantasy, overeating). Instead of boredom, manna came. I walked out into the dawn to find hints of red clouds strewn along the horizon. Just above a row of

cottonwood trees, a red fox was curled up in the snow, waiting for that first steam of sunlight. I had a long, uncomfortable talk with God. I reminded Him of my loneliness, and He held me for a while. Did this manna eradicate my desire? No, it deepened it. But it turned my forgetful heart toward God and away from an attempt to control my desire.

God gives us constant reminders of His love for us. But we turn up our noses, saying, *I'd really rather not be reminded of my hunger, thank you – If I can't have the full meal, I don't want it.* Macrina Wiederkehr says we stand in the midst of nourishment and we starve. In the face of this disregard, God sends Himself in the form of His Son. He gives away His inheritance, lavishing His beauty on our forgetful, prodigal hearts, bored hearts. He says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them...I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me..." (Jeremiah 32:36-40). This side of the fall, we want to control anyone and anything that has the power to disappoint our desire. But our deepest desire – the desire to commune with and worship God – does not disappoint. When we

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ADDICTION
 IS WORSHIP
 TURNED UPSIDE DOWN



Upcoming Events

Beginning Jan. 9	False Intimacy Group for men struggling with sexual issues	John Pierce
Early 2001	Wives of Sexual Addicts— call for more information	John Pierce
January 26-27	The Allure of Hope for Uptown Christ Covenant	Jan Meyers
Feb. 18, 25 & Mar. 4	First Presbyterian Kraemer Class	Palmer Trice

Beginning Jan. 9, 2000:

False Intimacy
a group for men

This Barnabas small group provides a context to begin thinking about the maze of issues underlying male sexual struggles. The group will provide a confidential context to begin thinking through your own battles with sexual temptation in light of scripture.

If you would like to participate in a FI group, call to set up a half-hour Pre-group Admission Interview.

“Barnabas” Training

Beginning in February!

A 14 Week Course Equipping You to Encourage Others

“Many of us want to care. We get involved, but we aren’t sure if our words are really helpful. Are they encouraging our friends toward Christ? When should I comfort and when should I confront? What is going on when couples struggle? We want to help but sometimes wonder if there are parts of our personality that hinder that process? Do I push too hard? Do I speak when I should be listening?”

These are the kinds of questions and issues that we will cover in "Barnabas Training"; a 14 week course designed to help you be an encourager for others. The course will include a 14 week small groups interaction and two weekends. There will be a tuition fee, call Barnabas for details.