

David Partington and Friends

Addiction Garbage, or Grace and Glory?

(Part Three)

Below is a story by a man I'm calling Nathan.

Nathan's story

Soon after birth, I began projectile vomiting all over the place. I quickly lost weight. Doctors soon discovered that I had been born with a defect in my oesophagus and stomach. I struggled to keep food down. My parents were told that if I could survive until the age of two, I could have an operation at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. And so began two incredibly stressful years not just for me, but for my mum and dad and my two older brothers.

Eventually, the time came for me to go into hospital. The procedure itself was on the cutting edge of medical expertise. There was a risk that it wouldn't be successful. Many people prayed for me as I was being cut open. The incision went half way round my body. This was back in the 1960s, before laser surgery. The operation included the need to remove a rib from my tiny body, but it was successful. I now have a beautiful, pencil thin scar from my sternum to my backbone. After time spent in oxygen tents, in isolation and under careful supervision, I was finally sent home.

Life contained many challenges as I grew up. On occasion, I continued to get food stuck in my oesophagus. Whenever this happened, there was immediate panic in the home. I was often picked up and slapped hard on the back to dislodge the offending object. I was also very late reaching puberty. In a family with four boys, I was the shy one. Girls were like aliens to me and I had no meaningful friendships with the opposite sex until I went to university. My communication skills with the opposite sex were poor.

At the age of twenty-seven, I got married to the first girl I had ever dated. Somehow I had managed to overcome my shyness. How I succeeded in kissing her, I have no idea. But I did! I was proud of myself.

In my work life, I moved from rehabilitation work into youth work, pastoring a large youth work, before moving onto a leadership role in a church. At the age of twenty-eight, I found myself leading a church on a difficult council estate. That was quite an experience. It was like heaven and hell at the same time. Remarkable healings and deliverance took place, but we were also surrounded by suicides and death.

As time went on, I found myself on a pedestal,

placed there by others. I came to be seen as a person to be emulated and revered. I confess that it went to my head. I felt I had made it in some way. As you can imagine, a big fall was not far away. I found myself increasingly isolated in my position, so I began to visit porn sites. I also rang chat lines. No one else knew what I was doing; after all, I was pastoring a church and church leaders don't do that. In public, I shared little of my own 'stuff.' I had fought hard to reach my position; no one was going to knock me down. I felt, rightly or wrongly, that if I shared my own areas of weakness, I would be judged for it.

Pornography led to other things, and very soon I found myself in the red light area. It was the first time I had ever done anything like this, and I felt so guilty. I was mortified. When I got home, I couldn't keep it to myself. I told my wife. Now that I think back, I can't remember if I resigned or if I was asked to step down. But whichever it was, it was devastating. My dreams and aspirations were gone. I felt an overriding sense of loss, of grief. I was no longer a leader, my marriage was in serious trouble, and my friendships were in tatters.

To keep the wolf from the door, I became a post-man. At least it put food on the table. The years passed, but after about five years, I found myself once again in the red light district of my city. So did the police. My name appeared as a footnote in the local paper, exposing me to embarrassment and pain. I felt like nothing had changed in my life. In fact, things had got worse. Despite counseling, there had been no change. I'd also started to frequent massage parlours.

Somehow my marriage survived. That was a miracle in itself. But I'd reached a point of despair. So after crying out to God, I took an opportunity to move back into rehabilitation work. It wasn't easy. By this time, I had two small boys of my own, but the new job meant we had to move. So off we went to another town. Life improved and I was offered a promotion, which involved yet another move. I became the deputy manager of a housing project for recovering addicts. Working with addicts seemed very natural to me. I bonded easily with them. Of course, it's obvious now. I understood their problems because I still had a

problem of my own. The old patterns were still there; at times I was clean, but at other times, I was still a frequent visitor to massage parlours. Deceit came so easily; how could my life look so good on the outside when it was riddled with such shameful behaviour? I was good at hiding the truth, both from others and from myself.

Later on, I moved again, taking up a post in another city to manage a different rehabilitation project. It was a fantastic job. It had everything I could want in a job. And I was good at it. The project grew quickly, which was great. The truth about who I was and what I was doing, however, never really changed. I still went to the same places. So I told a friend, who very courageously decided to tell my bosses. I knew he was right to tell them; after all, what would happen if one of these women came into the project? The project would be totally compromised. My bosses confronted me and I stepped down immediately. On reflection, that was about the only honourable thing I did throughout this entire process.

The bottom fell out of my life; it had happened again. To say I was devastated was an understatement; how could I be moving under clear anointing, yet possess such an enormous blind spot? I myself didn't even think I could be trusted.

For the next year and a half, I was in shock. I had a couple of good jobs in the addiction field, but I was still reeling from what had happened. My wife and I went for marriage counseling and I did the 12-Step programme with Alcoholics Anonymous. In truth, however, I wasn't really taking any responsibility. People kept telling me I was a sex addict, but I refused to admit to the scale of the problem. Yes, I had issues, I knew that, but an addict? No, not me.

I sought counsel from friends, and truth be told, on the surface, I was doing well. I had a lot of energy and ideas. I went into consultancy work and opportunities opened up for me. After a while, I decided to set up my own recovery project in a nearby city. Was God really giving me another chance? I didn't doubt my ability, but I did doubt my character. In fact, I reached a point where I felt that honesty was the only way forward. So I told my new employers about my struggles.

Then I took drastic action.

After taking professional advice, I realised that my principle addiction related to physical touch. I craved the comfort which sex gave me, so I had to cut that out altogether. For six months, I eliminated all physical contact. It resulted in tremendous emotional and physical pain as I went through withdrawal. My body craved touch, it was horrendous; I thought I was never going to come through it. Every morning, I would wake up, and the pain was still there.

Gradually, however, the agony began to subside. Every day now, I face my issue and call it an addiction. I battle it on a daily basis. I'm constantly on the look out for compulsive, obsessive behaviours taking root in my life. I know that I'm an addict and as such, I'm in danger of cross-addicting into a host of other damaging areas. When I recognise the early stages of bad behaviour, I put fresh boundaries in place, no matter how painful.

Although now divorced, I feel a release. Everyone who matters to me knows my issues. This allows me to continue tackling my addiction. I feel that I

am in the final stage of the grieving process. My dreams and aspirations may be gone, but I'm in a better place now, working out how to reorder my life. I've come to terms with the reality that I am a sex addict in recovery. I attend Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, and it has helped me immensely to understand the process physiologically. I understand that I need to maintain

a high level of honesty in my life. I understand that my tendency to protect hidden areas leads to deceit and an ever-growing risk of returning to my addictive ways.

I now find increasing opportunities to discuss sex and love addiction in different forums. Individuals and churches seek me out.

As I've grown, I've found that I have no difficulty in sharing deep areas of shame and hurt. This addiction is truly a cunning and baffling disease. However, I've discovered that with openness and honesty – and a willingness to leave no stone unturned in the quest for recovery – there is a path through the undergrowth to a new life.

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David Partington

David Partington worked in drug rehabilitation for seventeen years before becoming the General Secretary of ISAAC (International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition) in 1997. ISAAC has grown into a network of well over 3500 individuals and projects in over 70 countries. He is the author of two books on addiction, *Kicking It (IVP)* and *Pills, Poppers and Caffeine (Hodders)*. Many of the articles listed on the Living Leadership website are edited excerpts of his latest book, *Garbage, or Grace and Glory?*

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