



David Partington and Friends

Addiction Garbage, or Grace and Glory?

(Part One - Introduction)

MEET BERNIE. Before he's even switched on the laptop, he's filled with self-hatred. It's not just the desperate compulsion to view the images, it's the fact that he's tried to stop so many times and failed. More times than he can remember. And being a Christian makes it much worse. He knows he doesn't need porn, but he just cannot stop clicking that mouse.

He doesn't pay to visit websites yet, but the very idea terrifies him. He hates how his behaviour affects him. He cannot stop the relentless intrusion of certain images into his mind. It often happens at the worst times, like during church services. It's also the deceit, the excuses and lies he tells to explain why he goes online after his wife has gone to bed. He's ashamed at the surreptitious way he has to angle his screen at work. And then there's the deep down fear that one day, someone from IT will ask to check out his hard drive.

Perhaps the most shameful aspect of his behaviour is the way he pretends that all is well in his Christian 'walk.' He presents a respectable front, and does so very successfully. Yet, behind the mask is a grubby reality he cannot deny. He wants to stop. But how?!

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MEET AL. His progression from a bottle a week to a bottle a day took about four years. He's still justifying it: 'having a glass of port after the meal helps with my digestion.' But he knows that it's really just vain justification. He doesn't even buy it himself. Right now, he has two worries. Driving and concentration. He's often over the limit 'the morning after.' And at work, his boss has noticed that he's not quite with it. Especially in the afternoons.

A while back, he managed to cut down. In fact, he went dry for two weeks. But then Christmas crept up on him. There he was, enjoying the evening, and before he knew it, he was holding his wine glass out for a top-up. Currently, his greatest fear has to do with loss of control. It feels like alcohol has him on the ropes. It helps so much to calm down, to feel 'normal.' In addition, his wife seems almost resigned to his drinking. She's tired of confronting him. So they're slowly drifting apart. As for his Christian life, church is on the back burner. And he finds it

increasingly difficult to pray, let alone read the Bible.

Insider's View

These are just two snapshots of what I call 'a life-controlling' problem. They are behaviours which gain an ever tightening grip on a person's life. And they are problems which result in a scale of pain and despair that few around them fully grasp. I have an insider's view, because I recognise myself in these stories. An intense relationship with another woman once took over my life. Now, thirty years later, I can see the compulsion behind my actions. I made choices which broke the rules of the company where I worked. I was a terrible witness for my Lord. In fact, I ended up walking away from my God, my wife, and my family. Such was the hold that my behaviour had on me, I lived a life oblivious to the pain and despair I was causing to those who loved me the most. It's painful even to remember that period in my life.

Now, three decades on, I can testify to the work of God in my life. It fills me with wonder that God, in his mercy and grace, chose to use my experience to help others. He is indeed a God of hope, a vital character trait, since to defeat a life-controlling problem, you need a lot of hope. A lot.

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Now, when I think of my relationship with God, a powerful image comes to mind. I see a grubby little boy looking up at a dazzling light. The mucky little

urchin is dressed in an oversized but gorgeous robe, and on his head he wears a royal crown which is patently too big for him. The power of the image comes from my connection with its meaning. I'm a dearly beloved child, who despite my sin and failure, is now accepted and welcomed by my heavenly Father. When I see it in my mind's eye, I also see hope for others.

This hopeful conviction I now possess is rooted in personal experience. I find it reinforced time and again in the faces of others whose lives have been transformed in a similar fashion. As Dr. Derek Munday wrote, 'God is totally committed to redemption and restoration. If it were possible to rank God's attributes, this would be amongst the most important for us.' (Christians in Caring Professions Newsletter, August 2002.)

In my next article, I'll be looking at how even the best, the most secure of us, can end up with a life-controlling problem. I'll also offer some hope.



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, with 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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If you need support, contact our team on support@livingleadership, and we'd be happy to connect you to a service of ours that would help.