

David Partington and Friends

Addiction

Facing Reality On God's Terms

Those with a life-controlling problem will eventually ask two critical questions.

They are:

- How did I get into this state?
- Where is God?

Perhaps you're not asking these questions yet. It could be that you're in the early stages of your life-controlling problem. Maybe you believe that there are enough 'positives' to convince you that things really aren't that bad. Nevertheless, these two questions will eventually surface in your mind.

Perhaps sooner than you think.

They tend to come to the fore when the reality of your situation breaks through the thin veneer of your rationalisation and justification. For the drug addict, these questions often come in the middle of a particularly bad period of withdrawal. For the alcoholic, they can arise when they wake up after a night's drinking, covered in vomit. For the porn addict, it might be when they realise they're seeking a level of thrill which they swore they'd never seek. For the gambler, it's often when they lose so much money, the very security of

their home is threatened. For the anorexic and bulimic, it's often when they find themselves in A&E for the first time.

There are as many scenarios as there are people with life-controlling problems, but the questions remain the same. When you're ready to find answers to the questions, that's when you're ready to move forward and find health.

Quit the pity party routine

First, it's essential to stop the rationalising and the justification. It really doesn't matter how or why you ended up in this situation. What's important is that you can change. Stop looking for scapegoats, and stop making excuses. It isn't someone else's fault when you made those choices. They were the wrong choices and you must accept that truth. Taking responsibility is just the first step, but it's a critical one. In order to move forward, you will need to:

- Accept responsibility for what's happened.
- Recognise sin for what it is.
- Choose to forgive those whose influence led to your making some very poor choices.

Accept responsibility and recognise your sin

To do otherwise is to remain trapped where you are. Accepting responsibility for what went wrong frees you to start gaining some perspective. Even if you didn't know exactly where it was going to lead when you took that first drink or you clicked on that first image, you knew what you were doing early enough to stop. Face reality - you did it because you liked doing it, and you made a choice to have more, see more. To pretend otherwise is to continue to live in the fantasy world you created for yourself. Accepting responsibility is painful and desperately uncomfortable, but then again so was staying in the pigsty for the Prodigal Son.

Forgive others

To start down the road to freedom, it's essential to clear the decks. That means forgiving others. It may well be that others influenced the choices you made. They may have gone drinking with you. They may have lent you a computer with dodgy images on it. They may have accompanied you to the bookies. Perhaps there was even physical or mental abuse. Or violence.

First, this sort of pain and hurt cannot be completely erased from our minds. However, it can be forgiven. It's very possible that those who mistreated you are not aware of the full extent of the pain they caused you. Nor do any of us truly understand how much we have hurt others. The main challenge isn't figuring out others' responsibility; it's dealing with the pain inside. It's also getting rid of the fuel which drives your rationalisation and your justification. Anger, shame, bitterness, resentment, they fuel not only the damaging behaviours but the reasons we use to justify what we're doing. That's got to change.

The only way to do this successfully is to come before your Creator. It is an act of surrender, when you offer all your 'stuff' to him. He prom-

ises to deal with it, and he will do so on his own terms. When we go through this process, it leads to forgiveness. Unburdening ourselves before God creates an opportunity to offer forgiveness to those people who have hurt us. Forgiveness doesn't happen just once. It is a choice we make every day.

So choose to forgive. It's the only path to health.

Remember God loves you

The love of God is the most powerful force in the universe. Your heavenly father loves you with an unquenchable, unstoppable, unremitting love, which is everlasting. Unfortunately, many of us think we have to get ourselves sorted out before we can enjoy God's love. Not true. Not even close to true.

There is sometimes another thing which happens when God's love is mentioned. For my part, I became defensive. I would ask, 'but where was God when it was all going wrong?' I know many Christians who have responded in the same way. They are well aware that God exists, they even believe that Christ died for them, but where was he when they needed him most? Some, like me, have used this question to justify our sin and our ongoing bad behaviour.

My Story

I was just like the Prodigal Son. I said to God, 'I want life on my terms - you are not enough!' So I wandered about in the wilderness for five years. At first, it didn't seem like a wilderness at all. It was exciting, different; I'd even say it was fulfilling. But that was a lie. Without God's Spirit, I soon realised that my life lacked real love, it had no depth and certainly no hope.

As I gradually woke up, I began to see it for what it was: an exercise in selfishness where thrills were transitory and I lacked real love and meaning. Slowly but surely, I came to the realization that I had to do business with God. The one true God. I was stuck and he was the only answer. By degrees,

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I came to terms with my erroneous beliefs about him. I had created a god of my desires, who satisfied my needs, my demands. This god didn't exist and I had to face up to that fact.

In my rebellion, I had found that I couldn't fully escape the God who was actually there. It wasn't guilt that drove me to my knees, but love. God's love was extended to me through my wife (as well as friends), who just kept loving me. In addition, things happened for which there was no explanation. God spoke to me in the circumstances of my life and I finally began to listen.

As I returned to my heavenly father, I was surprised by the attraction of his holiness. Whilst I wanted a God to satisfy my needs, there was something astonishing about how different he was; he was truly a God of holy fire. The one I had created had ended up shallow and worthless. The real God I now encountered was one of glory and majesty. He gave me an identity and a purpose. I also found in his holiness the answer to my selfishness. He was right to be angry with my behaviour. His holiness spoke of perfect justice and that helped me understand why my behaviour had consequences. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about his holy anger towards my sin was that it was motivated by pure and unending love. He was angry because he loved me with a fierce, protective love. This love was hurt by my choices. He grieved when he saw me damage a relationship which was supposed to be founded on love.

As I came to my senses, I began to have hope. I began to see God's love in a new way. Here was divine love, deep beyond words, which refused to settle for second best. So hope began to rise. I recognised that the emptiness in my soul was driven by a lie. I couldn't believe that someone loved me for who I was, instead of what I could do for them. But then something beautiful happened. I began to see that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not intended simply to bring forgiveness, it was designed to pave the way for a loving relationship with my Creator. I opened myself to God's love, and it filled me, satisfying

me beyond anything I had imagined.

One of the key lessons for me was this one: I learnt that you cannot earn love. There is nothing that you can do to make God love you more. You must simply stand and receive it. Human love, beautiful though it can be, is not enough. We need to know and enjoy the love of our Creator.

When I started doing this, I began to find that his love was enough. But, wonderful though it was, living in that new relationship was not easy. I quickly saw the need for repentance. It wasn't an option. It was essential. As I trusted in God's forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, I was

also moved to seek forgiveness from those I had hurt. I earnestly desired to change, to live a wholly different life. I was conscious of my own frailty, and sought to put on a new identity – created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph.4.24).

Alive at last!

As I repented and God changed me, the reality of a new life free of life-controlling habits began to take shape. I learnt some important truths about God's promises. Freedom from life-controlling problems is possible because God has a lot more for us than just 'gripped teeth Christianity.' Peter writes in his second letter that God has made it possible to 'participate in the divine nature and *escape* the corruption in the world caused by evil desires' (2 Peter 1: 3-4). In other words it's not about striving, but living in the reality of what God has already done, rather than what we can do in our own strength. The Bible tells us that 'God made you alive with Christ' (Colossians 2:13).

I wonder how you respond to what I've written. If you want to take hold of this new life, it's important to understand what it's for and how God works. At first glance, you might think this has to do with your own choices. And there is a sense in which you *do* begin to make better choices. But this is only true because of what God has done. It is his work in Christ which has set you free. You are not freeing yourself by making better choices.

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No, a life lived free of life-controlling problems is possible because of what God has *already* done for you. It is possible because of who God is, and what he's done. All that we need to do is respond to God's prompting, his leading. Each day, as you start your day, begin with prayer. Thank him for the freedom, which is yours 'in Christ,' because of what he has done for you on the cross. You are no longer imprisoned by your sin, but free to live a Spirit-filled life, for the sake of the one who made you.

A new life

As God takes hold of your life, he will begin to do wonderful things in and through you. Rick Warren said it this way, 'God takes us, he breaks us, he blesses us and then he uses us.' Only when we allow the divine life of Christ to rule over us and to flow from us do we really begin to know the extent of what Christ has achieved through the cross. Only then will we experience the power of his Resurrection life.

So seek him. Call on him. Pray that you will come to a better understanding of what God has done for you, that by divine revelation you will recognise what you have been given. Then, with God's help, find the courage to share this new life joyfully in your home, in your church, at school and at work. It's the very life of Jesus, and it's best used when we serve others at the expense of our own needs and reputation. What's the result? Well, people will come face to face with Jesus . . . through you. Amazing, isn't it?

How they respond is between them and God.

Our call is to be channels of his divine life and power.



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?*

