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Volume 3 – 2011

Graceful Accent from the Ashes of Sexual Addiction

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Introduction – Decent Into the Pit

She was sleeping around, but also with two gentlemen she called friends with benefits. Sad and depressed, she decided to make another attempt at counseling. Tired and reluctant, she returned from the consultation room with the good of finding some resolution.

“You better find a therapist and learn to work a program,” screamed Malcom’s wife as she tearfully pondered the phone records and hotel fees on their credit card bill. Remorseful but guarded he entered the consultation room, expecting the Christian therapist to greet him with righteous judgment and discipline. If I can restrict my desire then I can beat this thing.

“What the f__k do I need a shrink for!” Exclaimed Ross, in trouble for sexual assault; charged by his then supposed girlfriend.

These and many others approach offices and churches all around the world hoping to find hope and healing... but does it work? Can the gospel combined with authentic connection correct the attitudes of a darkened mind, trapped in the enchantment and ensnared by the grip of sexual addiction? Let’s see the journey of these broken individuals as they encounter grace, relationally applied.

A. Prisoner Profiles

Reanna, a 51 year old female, lives as a struggling believer an insurance agent for a local bank. She has struggled with sexually pleasing herself since she was 8-years-old. She has drifted in and out of therapy with secular and Christian therapists alike for almost twenty years. She reports she has tried deliverance, counseling, hyper Christian practices of all sorts and denial to deal with her sexual behavior for over 30 years. She now reports rest, serenity, and forgiveness from Christ – what happened?

Malcolm, a 45 year old male, married, lives as a successful business owner. Malcolm grew up in a very conservative, restrictive religious home. He was raised in an environment in which his mother ruled with an iron fist. There were a number of severe beatings and confinements for both minor and major home living infractions.

Malcolm also reports being sexually molested as an elementary student by 3 girls, middle school age. He's had a problem with pornography since he was 13-years old and has had many emotional and sexual affairs in his married life. Now, he is living a peaceful, forgiven, and less fear-filled life-why?

Ross, a 19 year old male, is currently serving time in jail for multiple aggravated assaults and sexual assaults. As a young boy (5-6 years old) this youngster was assaulted by an older teenage girl and a middle aged male neighbor. The crimes were disregarded and Ross promptly repressed these incidents. He buried the abuse pain, then a pattern of assault toward himself and others ensued. He was angry, humiliated, and insecure. He attempted to normalize the abuse and became sexually assertive toward others and himself. His behavior included self-motivation, self-structure, and pride-filled arrogance of entitlement. The behaviors knew no boundaries and included both females and males continued and the male insecurity was a constant plague to him toward other females. It also drove bold and dramatic displays of his manhood which admittedly he always felt like he had to prove. This story, at this time, has not had a conclusion.

B. Descent into the Pit, James 4:1-6

James 4 is a text that clearly describes the descent into soul murder . All three of the prisoners described above can be depicted as captives of *Epithymeo* – a quality within every human heart, placed there by God. *Epithymeo* is Greek for desire, craving, and longing. It is poison built on strong feelings (i.e. pursuit-pleasure or avoidance-pain).

Reanna desires a connection with another human in the honesty and rawness of nakedness. She desired to give herself to another and to be loved boldly. On the other hand, Malcolm longed for protection from pain and the ability to pursue pleasure without condemnation. He deeply craved freedom from all the responsibilities he had always seem to carry for others. Ross simply longed to silence the pain and he figured an intense mixture of pleasure and pain was the best avenue to achieve this end.

The implied clincher in the text is the phrase “you desire but do not have.” We now understand that addiction is grounded in this pit-based deception, desire and not having. Awkward, one knows that I didn’t get what I desired, and translates that feeling into the reality of

being disregarded by God and all authority figures. This disregard figures into all “prisoner” profiles of addiction, and it feels like I was disregarded by God ultimately. As well as initially disregarded by the authority figures in all prisoner profiles. They would all agree few, if any, people responded to or even discerned their real desire. Therefore, they assumed or presumed God missed it too. So if their request, spoken or unspoken gets disregarded by people who are supposed to love us, – then they are either left to fail or to rebelliously take matters into their own hands.

Ah, now enters coveting on the scene. There is the major motivation to quarrel and fight. Their thought is, “nobody is doing it for me so I’m left to do it myself.” Addiction (sexual) changes our brains powerfully and the chemical release of arousal and orgasm is a mind altering experience or shall we say a “mind-darkening experience.”

C. Arrival at the Pit, Jeremiah 2:13

The lock to the dungeon (bowr) clicks when people make two deadly choices! Jeremiah says God’s people. (Important to note – Jeremiah doesn’t say the pagans, or Gentiles.) People make two decisions that garner time in the ‘hole’.

First choice: forsaking living water. Who in their right mind would forsake living water, fresh life producing water? Who forsakes love? The answer is those who have had love and intimacy distorted or even perverted. The substance contaminating the perception of being loved is law and/or condemnation. Punishment is something we all move away or avoid. So it makes sense then that if God is equated with punishment, Malcolm, Reanna, and Ross would all move away, even avoid any association with so called “love”.

The second choice seems more insane. We dig cisterns (nice version of the word bowr) that we eventually discover *do not* hold water. I’ve never heard a grave or a dungeon built to contain the good or the living.

Malcolm reports “I came to understand my refuge of pornography and affairs as prison to which there were no keys or at least I did not possess them.” Reanna reports, “my darkside would take over and I could neither resist nor restrain, I just learned to live (or hide) in the aftermath.” Ross believed that he was entitled to the proverb of an “eye for an eye” and he elected himself to be the

complete court room in that he was prosecutor, judge, and jury. People must pay for the debt that he could not comprehend or resolve.

**D. Darkness Invades and Persuades, Ephesians 4: 17-19 and
Romans 1:22-24**

Hence we find parallel texts both clearly illuminating the impact of the dry pit on the mind and heart. Reanna submits, “Darkness made it possible for almost anything and while anything was happening, I grew colder. I felt dead on the inside. It was desire that gave me the illusion of power and control – I was finally ‘alluring’ the thing that escaped me as an adolescent.”

Futility – is feelings of emptiness, purposelessness, or worthlessness. Life for the sex addict became futile (empty) because of the decision to trust self. This decision to trust self to meet personal needs is a core belief that all our prisoners of addiction have to trust others is to experience more pain and isolation. They become disillusioned and begin to interrupt isolation as being in control of self and other. They rationalize the isolation as power and deny the need to be in relationship with anyone including God, rejected hope in the person of the “Father”. Hence, their divineness disappears – disconnected from love and leaving the heart hopeless and purposeless.

Darkened understanding – inability to discern truth from deception. Sex addicts sincerely believe their reality and they sincerely believe in their ability to free themselves. Malcolm said, “I lost my bearings, everything became relative in comparison to the most recent experience. I did not compare large chunks of experience, but rather I compared yesterday to today and there always seemed to be a small difference.” Eternity grows dim and distant for the sex addict. The immediacy and intensity of the moment is the focus. Reanna confesses, “I fell deeper into the hole, I took more and more risks sexually, not intentionally but consistently. And it wasn’t just sex, everything I did was sketchy.”

Malcolm admits “I lost sight of my faith – I no longer believed God could continue to love or have mercy on me. At some point, He had to have tired of me and my after the fact regrets, confessions, and attempts to clean myself up. So to hell with it – just do it.” (He further reflects, “This attitude actually led me back to Christ and I discerned the Father’s love never fails!”) This increased frustration with

themselves and distorts their victimization to validate their perpetration of self and other. In the healthier world, addicts must learn to manage their victim issues. If they do not, they complete the cycle and perpetrate. Managing skills through thinking, feeling, and building healthy relationships with God and together people become a pillar in answering the transforming questions of how the profiled individuals have brought and accepted change in their worlds.

**E. Discovering Salvation – *Liberty* – Instead of Condemnation,
John 3:16-21, Isaiah 42:7, and Isaiah 49:9**

Reanna, one day while talking about her continued entry into sexual addiction tells me of her notion of God as disregarding her due to her failed attempts to stop the behavior (i.e. casual sex and porn stimulated masturbation). So we looked at God's word (John 3:16-21 and Isaiah 42:7 and the phrase "did not send...." caught her eye.

It was important to Reanna that the author of this love project was God (the Father) who sent His son to redeem the world. Or as Isaiah says, "to set the captives free"; to bring release from the darkness of the dungeon.

F. Recovery from the Addictive Pit

1. Authentically Approach or Re-approach Him

From the bottom of the pit and the darkness of it, light is frightening, and often unclear. I've met lots of people inside and outside God's flock wandering in the purposelessness of darkness – sex addiction (and Hebrews 4). But how do we approach God there? To Reanna, Malcolm, and even Ross, I asked them to consider coming to Him as they are and let Him clean them up. "Come unto me all who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest." This was an invitation to trust something greater than themselves and their sexual addiction. This invitation was offered to face their idolatry and let God be who he said that He is.

Reanna and Malcolm accepted the offer. Ross is too afraid and angry about feeling disregarded by God to trust anything. Embedded in the Hebrews text is the idea of coming to the Father with confidence to get what you need. So to all addicts of all sorts, this means come with your desire(s) and sense of disregard, while at the same time getting acquainted with His promises:

1. God sees me (Hebrews 4:13)
2. God sympathizes with me
(Hebrews 4:15)
3. God will deal with me gently
(Hebrews 5:2)
4. God loves me (Hebrews 4:16)
5. God will change me (Jeremiah
31:34, Hebrews 8:10)
6. God praises me (Jeremiah 32:38)
7. Good is ahead of me (Jeremiah
32:40)
8. Good is guaranteed to me
(Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:10)
9. He'll help me persevere (Isaiah
40:29)
10. He'll help me be content
(Philippians 4:12-13)

Luke 12:1 warns us to be on guard against yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (hypokrisis). It is wearing a disguise pretending to be one way while being another way. The first step is authentically approach the throne of God. The second step is to learn to regard tension and desire (that is unmet desire and the invitation by God to talk and face life on life's terms). The third step is to build trust with God and others so that life can be restored and renewed.

2. Confident – Stand and Speak Freely, Ephesians 3:11

It is hard enough to bring the sexual behavior to God. Adam caught in shame and fear hid behind fig leaves. So we, too, wear our fig leaves. The scriptures say we can learn to be still before God and we can speak freely to Him. David seemed to have this ability to approach God and even though he lived a life far from perfection. He's one of many spiritual heroes whose Achilles heel was sexually addicted behavior.

Ephesians 2 tells us we have peace and the hostility that existed between God and us has been removed by the person and life of Christ. Because that is truth, then sex addicts need to come to understand their behavior is *not* surprising to God, God is *not* disappointed with the sexual struggle – He did not appoint us to perfection in the first place. God knows we do *not* live in a perfect world or that we are perfect. The addicts I work with are often most disappointed with themselves – they did appoint themselves to be able to move beyond their addiction. They believe that they are the only one that has fallen sexually. Because of their isolation they need to be able to redeem themselves. – Wrong!

Malcolm states, “Now I understand I can come to the Father as I am – broken and covered with leaves of my own shame. God is who He says He is and keeps His promises. I *can* come before my heavenly Father dirtied by sin and it doesn't affect God's vision or mood. He sees the addict through Christ's blood. I, now, sometimes complain and it often turns into praise or at least gratitude.” When addicts begin to comprehend the gift of grace; they understand the fight requires a response. The response is gratitude and a spirit of humility.

3. Transforming My Disbelief into Confident Belief, Matthew 11:29

Reanna confesses, “As I understand the nature and intent of God’s grace the more willing I am to submit to His love and change.” Matthew 11 promises the sex addict something their behavior will never produce - REST! To discover God deals with them gently was revolutionary for both Malcolm and Reanna. In the face of their continual and escalating sexual behavior, God’s face had become rugged, harsh, and his eyes condemning and judgmental.

“As love becomes love for the first time,” Reanna states, “I’m finding myself more gentle to me and more importantly to others. I’m less likely to judge others of being unable to love. Unwilling to show compassion, or utterly hyper critical. I’m being changed by the Father’s love expressed through Christ and the authentic fellowship with others.” So, the gospel is now really good news to Malcolm and Reanna. A rested soul is a soul open to gentleness, mercy, and intimacy with God, others, and self.

4. Strength in Demonstration of Love, Ephesians 3:16-19; 1 John 4:19-20

“To know” is to be with or to be within. As one turns toward a God who first turned toward us the knowledge of love disperses within us. Sex addicts begin to have their interactions with people transformed as they engaged with others to give, and not get. “It’s hard to imagine love could see beyond my behavior and the hurt I inflicted on my wife and kids,” says Malcolm. Through this lens of forgiveness and reconciliation both Malcolm and Reanna are walking demonstrations of love. Through their willingness to expose their darkness they’ve grown as agents of light and mercy. Other dark dwellers have been set free and released from their dungeons of sexual addictions.

Conclusion

Reanna, Malcom and Ross are all victims of sin (missing the mark our Father has set for us all). We have come to understand though painful, the decent in addiction, like the law, teaches us to understand our powerlessness and the need to trust the Father’s love. Emptying ourselves of pride and ego is the beginning of the accent often called recovery. It is here we learn the new covenant fresh and

Testamentum Imperium – Volume 3 – 2011

anew. God makes the promises and facilitates our transformation and we learn to authentically remain in Him and serve others in love, not out of our selfishness – Praise the God!!



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