

LOOKING UP DAILY DEVOTIONAL | APRIL 12

Sinaholics Anonymous

A while ago I heard a quote that got me thinking. World renowned addiction specialist Dr. Gabor Maté shared his simple definition of addiction. He said, "Addiction is any behaviour that a person craves, finds temporary relief or pleasure in but suffers negative consequences as a result of, and yet has difficulty giving up".

As a Christian, I couldn't help but listen to his definition and immediately think of sin in general. I couldn't help but think how this levels the playing field for all of us. When most people think of addiction they think of the extremes like substance abuse, sexual deviance or even excessive gambling. But if we are honest, we all must face our natural inclination towards what God calls sin despite its negative consequences.

Life is not easy and our frail and fallen human condition makes us vulnerable to seeking things that will numb the problems of life. Sin offers us temporary pleasure but delivers a long-term prison. Sin is taking a poor substitute for the good blessing that God desires to give us in His time and in His way.

It should give us pause before judging others to understand that addiction to sin is something that we all must face in our lives. It should give us a desire to employ every tool that God gives us in Jesus to contend with our addiction to sin and find victory. Things like...

Forgiveness - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Wise Direction - "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:14).

Escape - "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Spiritual Fruit - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23).

Loving Community - "If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

God's Good Gifts - "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived... Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:15-17).

Steven Amorin

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Gone Fishing

As the weather gets nicer this year, something I cannot wait to do is to go fishing. Ever since I was young there has been a real thrill each time I got to spend time casting my line. I could tell you about when I was nine years old and got to spend the night on a fishing boat with my dad out on the Bay of Fundy hooking dog sharks... when I saw the legend of the lake and didn't have time to dip my line in... when I fished a tiny pond in town and landed a monster... the one that was thiiiiiiiiis big and the one that got away... Almost as much fun as fishing itself are the stories that fishermen tell one another.

When I read the gospels I love the fact that the first people Jesus calls to follow him are a group of rough-around-the-edges fishermen. Jesus gave them some extraordinary fishing advice; the outcome? "*Peter was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him*" (Mark 1:17,18).

Of all people, why did Jesus choose fishermen first? I have a few ideas...

Fishermen are patient – This is the #1 quality of a fisherman and why so many would-be fishermen give up. It takes patience to rise with the sun, find the right spot, set up your gear and wait for the first bite. Jesus is looking for those who will be patient for results.

Fishermen have faith - They know what it's like to spend a day on the water and get skunked but keep at it anyway. When they want to quit they still have a feeling that the next cast could be the lucky one. It takes faith to cast a tiny lure into a big lake and expect something to happen. Jesus is looking for people who will be persistent in doing their best and anticipate success in God's time.

Fishermen are teachable – The best fishermen are eager to learn and listen to the wisdom of others who have more years of experience or knowledge of the body of water – Those who are arrogant, prideful and headstrong will find little success - Jesus wants people who listen well to the master and follow his lead.

Fishermen respect creation – Any good fisherman will make a living or practice their sport in a way that ensures future generations can enjoy it too. It takes respect for creation and being a good steward of what God has given us.

When Jesus sought to start a movement that would change the world, he did not choose the refined, clean-cut, well-educated – he chose ordinary people who would need to be patient, faithful, teachable and respectful. You and I are walking with Jesus today because they did not give up on fishing for us – now we are called to do the same.

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LOOKING UP DAILY DEVOTIONAL | APRIL 14

Are We There Yet?

I know how you feel, tired of the news, the disruptions, the constant changes, wondering how much longer this will all take... I know that anyone in a position of leadership like parents, doctors, educators, managers, politicians, pastors, are all feeling the frustrations of those they lead.

All this reminds me of the Israelites as they fled from slavery in Egypt under Moses' leadership. I imagine Moses like an exasperated dad, with white knuckles and bulging forehead vein, driving the minivan on a long family trip with kids in the back screaming, "ARE WE THERE YET?"

We read their story and wonder why the Israelites were so unruly. Why is it that a journey that should have taken forty days take forty years? Well, there was much they all had to let go of:

Idols – In Exodus 32 we read how the Israelites grew impatient with Moses as he sought God's direction on the mountain. Aaron foolishly allowed the people to fashion a golden calf as an idol to worship instead. Their journey was one of letting go of false gods and coming to follow Almighty God.

Doubt – In Numbers 13 we read how Moses sent a team of 12 spies to scope out the promised land. Only Joshua and Caleb returned with faith they would succeed. However, the crowds listened to the fears of the other ten spies. Because of their doubt only Joshua and Caleb and a fresh generation of Israelites would be ready to enter God's promise 40 years later.

Disobedience – In Deuteronomy 30 Moses stands before the Israelites and presents them with a choice between life and death, to walk in obedience with God's commands or forever wander.

Complaining – When God provided water in the wilderness, they complained it was bitter, when God provided manna and quail they hearkened back to the fish and cucumbers they had while slaves (Numbers 11). Moses was so exhausted by their complaining he would rather have died.

The Israelites' journey through the wilderness what not a matter of how far they were from their destination, but how far they were from God. God would use this time to refine and prepare a people to represent him in this world.

In our wilderness that is COVID, what are we learning to let go of? Are there things that have taken precedent over God that we need to be released? Are there new ways you are being called to let go of fear and renew your faith? Is there a step of obedience you have put off? Are you so focused on the problems you have become blind to the blessings?

I sure hope our journey through this wilderness doesn't take long, but I do know that God can use times like these to prepare His people to enter into greater things.

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