

Addiction

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I assumed it was just the curled-up body on the park bench, hand locked around its brown-bagged treasure.

I assumed it was the shaking hand seeking pockets for cash, a payment needed to still the tremors.

I assumed it was the selling of a warm body or a pint of blood or the spilling of the baby's piggy bank contents.

I used to think that addiction was something that happened to the Other. To the unwashed and the uneducated and the uncultured. To "those" people. Until the day when addiction's breath blew the roof off my house; until I discovered that people I loved, those I trusted, more than one of them who held my heart held it in the shaking, seeking hands of an addict.

Sometimes, addiction looks like the white-collared man with 2.5 kids whose chest is crushed by the weight of responsibility that he can never escape. Sometimes addiction looks like the mom for whom the Lego-filled, snot-streaked days are endless. Sometimes addiction looks like the teenager whose heart squeezes so tightly with pain that he just needs a way to loosen the cords, to breathe. Sometimes addiction looks like the demon of damaging memories that will never stop chasing us down.

Addiction is the promise of a hiding place, a dark, warm cave where we can be safe. Yet in the rare flicker of light, we glimpse that the cave leads to nowhere; that there are monsters inside who lick their lips while they wait to feed on our flesh.

Addiction is the warm-blanket promise of comfort, of relief. Yet it turns out to be threaded with lies, ridden with vermin.

When someone we love is smothered by that blanket, snared deep in that cave, we think at first that we can rescue. We can fix it. We hack at the boulders, sure we can cut the body free. We dig deep into the night, sure we can loosen the cave's rubble. We wear ourselves down to blood and bone trying to be their savior. But real rescue only shows up when we put down the sword, put down the shovel and let the Truth in.

It is addiction's shamefulness that keeps us in the dark of the cave, pulling us back from the very light we need, a light that tells us this: It takes ropes and strength and pulling and sliding backwards and inching forward painfully again and again and again to pull someone free. When we shine the headlamp of brave truth into the cave, not everyone will welcome that light. Some will run from the tangled, putrid mess before them. Some will stay, and in those people you will find your tribe, your rope-pullers, your saber-wielders.

But before we even begin to attempt such a rescue, we must stare down the dark tunnel of this painful understanding: If someone we love is held in the false comfort of Addiction's lying arms, we cannot save them. We cannot change them. We cannot fix them. Yes, they can find the help and the hope and the wholeness they need, but the sharp-edged fact we must accept is that the healing will not come from us. The addict must pick up his own shovel, grasp tight his own rope. She must break addiction's hypnotic gaze, if only for a moment. And when she does, we will be there. Only when she does. And only as part of a rescue team, only as one of many lamp-holders and shovel-bearers.

We would never dare storm a terrorist-filled hideout alone, with one gun, one bullet; and addiction is the ultimate terrorist. So gather your weapons, ready your arms for battle, and wait: Wait for the cry for help from the cave. And when you hear it, run toward it, but in the running, know this: Addiction is a hell of a fight. It is a battle that will take out the stragglers, the lone warriors who try to go it on their own. Run together. Run with those who know your story, with those who hold up to you the mirror of honesty rather than the funhouse-distorted reflection that addiction waves before your face.

If you feel alone in addiction's fortress tonight, if you feel that the lies of someone you love have twisted your reality until you know longer recognize what is real, know that this is addiction's agenda: To keep you alone and isolated until you are another tally mark on her wall, another victim of her deceit. Those who are in some way shattered by addiction are standing and walking and working all around us today; so many of us look like the moms and dads and carpoolers and classmates and professionals and students who have it all together, who have the pinterest-perfect lives. We don't. Not one of us does. It is time to break down the wall of shame that has hidden you from help. The good news is, you don't have to bludgeon down the whole rocky span. You just need one small, tiny space with which to reach your hand through. There will be a hand on the other side to grab you....the hand of a fellow warrior who will pull you through, who is there waiting for you to ask.

"It is absolutely terrifying the kind of deep suffering the happiest looking people are able to hide inside themselves." Nikita Gill

There are so many resources out there for those who are either in addiction or in relationship with an addict....a parent, a child, a spouse. Some of my favorite organizations are AA and Al-Anon. Celebrate Recovery is another excellent program with a Christian perspective to its 12 steps. If you need more resources, please feel free to message me as well.

Jessica is a wife, mother, teacher, and piano player