

The Role of Other People in Our Overcoming Habitual Sin

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

“My wife is drinking everyday now and it’s really impacting our relationship. I’ve been clean and sober for 15 years now... it’s getting to the point in my life where I just want to separate from her and go on with my life. I still do care for her, but the constant drinking every night... the hiding of vodka bottles throughout the house... is maddening. I’m in constant fear of failure, to say anything to her... usually leads to an argument. I still take life ‘one day at a time,’ but this is just getting unbearable.”¹

“I knew almost instantly when I started dating my husband that he was the one. I know it sounds cliché, but I really did have this feeling. Three months into our relationship we had problems. He took an EMT class and started to become friendly with a girl he used to know. But it was more than friendly; it was flirtatious and sexually charged. He would comment on pictures of her in a bikini and exchange flirty comments with her on social networking sites. I was devastated. I would look at the pictures of her and feel that I didn’t measure up. It felt like he was rejecting the very essence of who I was. The behavior escalated to the point that I threatened to leave. He said he would stop, but then days later he was back at it. At the time I asked myself, ‘If he knows he could lose the relationship and won’t stop, why is he doing it?’”²

These are two actual quotes from spouses who have dealt with the habitual sin in their marriage. Their words express the sadness, rejection, anger, and confusion that spouses often feel when their husband or wife struggles with a serious addiction or attachment. Most of us, at one time or another in our lives, have journeyed with a friend through his or her struggle with an addiction or attachment and we know that it can be *very* painful.

For the last few weeks, we’ve been looking at the role of habitual sin in our lives. We’ve looked at some of the ways in which we open ourselves up to God’s grace so that He might heal us. We’ve looked at the role of surrender and patience as God’s healing unfolds in our lives. This weekend, I want to focus our attention on the role of a close friend, or spouse, in the healing process. For the sake of simplicity, I’ll offer my suggestions using the language of spouses, but these could apply to other family members or friends, as well.

As I’ve done marriage counseling with couples, I’ve noticed that there are some couples who *need* to be separated or divorced for their own well-being, whereas other couples I feel should stay together for the eternal benefit of both. As you can imagine, this is not an easy distinction to make. When a couple makes the decision that separation or divorce is the only answer to their problems, it’s important that we as a church family surround them with love and

¹ <http://www.soberrecovery.com/forums/friends-family-alcoholics/104158-my-wife-alcoholic.html>

² <http://marriedtoasexaddict.com/katies-story-he-was-the-kind-of-guy-that-would-never-hurt-me-or-cheat/#more-5057>

compassion. It's also important that we support and encourage the couples who decide to work on healing their marriage. Having said that, I want to make it clear that this homily is not about couples who need to be separated or divorced. It's about the ones who are struggling with addictions and serious attachments in their marriage, but who are called by God to help one another work through them.

When a couple gets married, they pledge to stay together, "for better" and "for worse." Most couples don't imagine that these words might apply to future addictions, yet they often do. How can husbands and wives help to heal their spouse's addiction or serious attachment? Here are three suggestions that I've seen helpful. **First, it requires an awareness of the feelings that the attachment stirs up and a willingness to deal with them in prayer.** Remember the woman earlier who talked about her husband's attachment to another woman? She mentioned how his internet interactions left her feeling devastated, inadequate, and rejected. If she does not deal with those feelings *in prayer*, she will inevitably react out of those feelings toward her husband. In other words, if she is not letting God heal those feelings in prayer, then they will taint the ways in which she verbally and physically responds to her husband, both consciously and unconsciously.

Secondly, it's important for spouses to be loving and supportive, rather than critical. It is our human nature to criticize others as a way of trying to change their behavior. It is also human nature to reject criticism and often do just the *opposite* of what is being suggested. Therefore, it is important for spouses to support one another and encourage one another in a loving and gentle way, not a self-righteous or harsh way. Saint Paul says this same thing in these words, "No foul language should come out of our mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.... All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. (And) be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ" (Ephesians 4:29, 31-32). I truly believe that this can only be done if we are dealing with our feelings in prayer rather than unleashing them in the relationship (*see the previous suggestion*).

Thirdly, a spouse can be a wonderful accountability partner. Several years ago, I saw a statistic that named *accountability* as the most successful way to change a bad habit. In order for a spouse to be an accountability partner, the couple has to have a certain level of love and respect for one another and a willingness to be gentle. In that atmosphere, spouses can share with one another their struggles with attachments without the fear of rebuke or abandonment.

In closing, it's important for us to remember that the spouse with the addiction or attachment is not the only one who receives a benefit from these suggestions. There is an amazing benefit to our willingness to journey with a person who is struggling with a serious attachment. To put it simply, we are given the blessed opportunity to move from being mere disciples of Jesus Christ—getting to know Him and learning from Him—to being apostles of Jesus Christ—being sent out in His name to forgive, heal, and encourage. When we are willing to live these three suggestions, we join Christ in fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18).

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ Think of one instance when you loved and supported someone while they were struggling with an addiction or serious attachment. How did God love you during that time? In what specific ways did you serve as an apostle? What gets stirred up in your heart as you think about that time?