

## Which slide do I take!



It occurred to me this morning that our sexual addiction will always be present. In earlier units I have talked of the many aspects that we have to combat but never have I said that *it* actually 'goes away'.

It is a cycle or loop that we must recognise and manage. Either we allow ourselves to repeat the loop or we teach ourselves to change - to avoid the platform...to get off the slide!

The slide comes in different heights, shapes and locations. It provides thrills and surprises and always takes you somewhere quicker than you ever intended. Some slides are steep or hidden and some have multiple levels with twists and covered sections. They all have a few things in common though:

- they always go down
- It is virtually impossible to stop and climb back up once started
- You often can't see the end and it sometimes ends with a 'painful bump'
- You quickly forget the pain of landing in your desire to do it again
- It is more thrilling the higher your start from

I talk of a platform because that is where I see 'me' just before I recommence the process of self-deception and sin. I am content, satisfied and can see a long way. It is wonderful seeing how high you have climbed - how much you have achieved. What is so wrong with just stopping and enjoying the view? Unfortunately, I am an addict, I know how good it feels to go down that slide - I secretly crave and want that thrill. The longer I sit still, the more risk I pose myself.

The longer I rest, the more people I watch take that slide down. I watch them hit the bottom and then repeat the process all over again. They are having so much fun and there are so many choices to take. I begin to realise that these slides have been made for us - we are meant to have fun. But this is the route to impaired and disordered thought and this is why I never stop to look...

Our life in Grace is all about avoiding the 'little platforms' and instead continuing to climb up till we reach the 'safe' and final platform. To ignore the distractions all around us and to stay clear of easy exits.

We must learn to see these exits as the danger they truly represent. We must keep looking up and finding the next rung above. As Catholics we know there is a final resting place where we will be safe and that is where we must keep on heading.



SO NOW FOR THE REALITY

In this instance I am directing my words to those facing sexual addictions but in truth it can be any addiction or *occasion of sin*. The rungs of the ladder are no different to *The Way of the Cross*. So rather than looking at your addiction as a never ending cycle begin to treat it as a 'never ending' stairway. There is never a time when you stop climbing...never a time to stop fighting temptation.

Patrick Carnes talks about the 'Addictive System' in his book<sup>1</sup> dealing with sexual addiction. In it he describes a series of steps we voluntarily take in our repetitive cycle of destruction. He identifies four components that all addicts face:

1. Preoccupation
2. Ritualisation
3. Sexual Compulsivity
4. Despair

As a Catholic I would suggest there is a fifth component - Grace. It is this final component that allows addicts to break the cycle. In short, we must stay on the path of Grace.

**Preoccupation** is the first sign that things are starting to go wrong. It represents a mental state often disguised by a false sense of achievement. Perhaps showing too much pride in how well we have done to avoid sin. Our thinking is often disordered and easily impaired by our senses. We see it by the relaxations we adopt in our daily activities. We have become complacent in our need to defend against our 'known' temptations.

This is the moment when I think we have reached the 'first' platform/exit to our slide. We have decided to rest because we feel safe and 'in charge'. We fail to see the early indicators that will pull us toward the drop that the slide represents. Or worse, we see the indicators but fail to respond as we should.



Preoccupation can often be seen as a selfish state of mind. We become increasingly engrossed with 'one thought or activity'; often at the expense of something / someone else. For many of us, this does not necessarily represent sinful activity or sexual addiction - it could be as simple as spending increased amounts of time at work or at sport. For the addict, however, the preoccupation is mostly related to a thought or activity that has a sexual derivation.

**Example 1 :**

*Steve always goes to work at 8am and always takes the same route. He does this because he claims it is less stressful and easier on costs. His family have often suggested trying a quicker route which would allow him to leave later and spend more time with the*

<sup>1</sup> pg 26, Out of the Shadows published by Hazeldon, 1983.

*kids. He always says no. Unknown to his family, Steve has a sexual addiction that is triggered by the sight of certain item of clothing.*

*Steve takes this route at this time of day because he knows that it allows him the best opportunity to catch a sight of the item. Seeing the item does not cause him a **direct sexual response** but it certainly gives him a couple of butterflies in his stomach. He tells himself that it is not wrong to look; convincing himself that it's not deliberate because he goes to work this way...*

*Over time, Steve realises that he only sees the item if he delays leaving by 10 minutes. This results in more traffic and he starts getting to work later but he does get more 'sightings'. Steve lies to his boss and blames family commitments. At this stage, Steve's preoccupation with the item of clothing has made him 'selfish' in relation to his work and family needs.*

*Not long later, Steve is catching secretive glimpses of every person that walks down the street hoping to see the item of clothing. He is now so preoccupied by this activity that he starts driving a longer route home to increase opportunities. He still does not feel a direct sexual response but he does recognise he has now gone from 'chance' viewings to 'directed' viewings.*

*He is now driven by a need to see the item before he feels able to go home - he starts counting the times he sees the item/day. He tallies these numbers in a diary. Completing this diary also becomes a preoccupation with him. One day Steve is so preoccupied trying to see if a person ahead is wearing the item that he doesn't see the car in front suddenly stop...and he has an accident.*

The list and content of such preoccupations is relative to our individual addictive proclivities. At this point we know we are being careless in our actions but we are not yet willing to accept that we are on the slide - we are literally sitting at the top; our eyes are just starting to peek down the slope...

It is very hard to identify the point of 'no return' - especially when the slide is fairly shallow. With this in mind it is crucial that we recognise when we have *stopped climbing* - this is the point of most danger to us.

**Ritualisation** occurs at an 'undefined' moment but is generally observable by the increase in our addictive preoccupations. We may still feel we are in charge though we recognise we are at peril of sliding. We are starting to do things that we recognise from past addictive patterns will lead to sexual thoughts. We feel a subtle 'loss of control' as our behaviour begins to repeat unwanted activity. Our subconscious mind knows exactly what is happening and consciously we start to feel an undefined tension.

This increased tension begins to drive our physical and mental activities. Where once the preoccupation could be taken as harmless and 'non sexual' it now acts as the signal exciting us to go further.

### Example 2:

*Steve did not have the accident mentioned above, instead he just spent longer in his car. He was no longer able to convince himself that this activity was innocent. He had been an addict far too long. However, he did still think he was in control so he continued. His diary was full of daily*

*entries which also includes locations, times, descriptions. In the evenings he would read over his diary entries and at night would dream about them...*

*Steve's preoccupation with seeing this item of clothing had become so hard wired into his neural pathways that NOW he felt excited just hearing the radio chimes indicating it was 8am. Picking up his diary also caused him to feel excited. Getting into his car caused the tension to grow. If anybody tried to stop him or caused him to miss his routine he would get upset. He would rant and rave about his family being selfish causing him to be late for work.*

*His preoccupation had become a necessity - a ritual. This ritual consisted of various indicators that increased his sexual arousal:*

- *Waking up on a work day (weekends made him grumpy)*
- *Hearing the radio announce it was time to leave for work (he took less holidays)*
- *In his car, seeing the diary open with a pen beside it (the entries excited him)*
- *Turning left into Buckingham Parade (where he always saw the clothing item)*
- *Having to slow down at crossroads and junctions (he had longer to stare)*

*The same ritualisation also lowered his sexual arousal:*

- *Turning right into Barmen Avenue (where He worked)*
- *Putting his diary in the glove-box (nothing to write and nobody around)*
- *Returning to his house when it was winter (dark - can't see anybody)*

**Sexual compulsivity** (for a catholic) is that moment when you can no longer lie about your *loss of Grace*. You are well on the way down the slide and though you wish you could stop you have given up trying. This is the final example of impairment as the only 'fixed thought' in our mind is:

**'It is *impossible* to stop now! So I might as well enjoy it.'**

This compulsivity is based on the sexual pleasures and thrills and the knowledge of how much satisfaction we will feel. In this moment we have no care for our souls, no care for the despair soon to follow.

At this moment all we want to do is avoid the time of despair by filling our thoughts with all the different slides we can take. We know that eventually we must face the Confessional - but happily we put that off as long as possible and just enjoy the rides.





**Despair** is as unavoidable as hitting the ground when reaching the end of our ride. Sometimes it is barely felt - in which case we get up quickly and run to take the slide again. Often, we know that it will be bad, so



we deliberately deceive ourselves to think *it* is hopeless to resist and so better to extend the ride. We seek more dangerous and thrilling slides to satisfy us.

We think of ourselves as unwanted and monstrous failures that nobody could love. This is self deception and an example of impaired thinking. Whilst we are in this destructive cycle we don't want to be loved. We don't want to be given a reason for resisting.

We chose to stay in sin and instead work to keep the despair as short as possible. Our cycle of addiction increases in ever decreasing circles until we are sinning constantly and without regard to the imminent danger we, and others, are in...

Then we eventually hit a wall and we have just two choices forced upon us...

**Grace** is the only option I will discuss today because the reality is that only impaired thought allows us to believe there are truly two choices - when in fact, there is just one.

As Catholics we are privileged to have this available to us. It is a means to redemption and a source of continual hope. Of all of the components discussed, Grace is the only one that matters. Grace is the process of climbing the ladder and ignoring the exits leading to slides. As addicts (sinners) we know that any pause in our journey is dangerous.

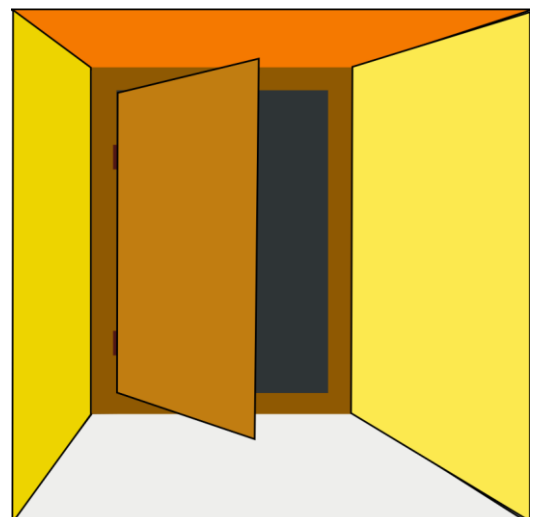
Grace is the example provided by Our Blessed Mother, Saint Joseph and all of the Saints. With Grace we can see through the despair of past failure, we can recognise the danger in approaching unguarded doorways. This is the time when we most feel at peace - we are not in battle anymore. Deep down we accept that which God expects of us...and we are willing to do it.

That feeling of Grace is so overpowering that I only need meditate on the *loss of it* to have an effective weapon against sin.

### So what now?

We must learn to guard ourselves against these inviting exits, these quick slides and thrills available to us in the modern world. We have to believe that there is hope and a future for us as addicts. We must treat our addiction as something to overcome but not as a curse to despair of.

You will have completed all of the Stage 1 Units and that means you know how to battle the pull of the unexpected slide. You know what behaviours you must guard against and you know what armour you have to protect you. But it is no good to you if you keep putting it in the cupboard when you think you are safe.



We are never safe and we must never stop climbing!

All that is truly left is for you to believe that Grace is real and that you are loved by God. Never stop climbing and instead start to enjoy the satisfaction of attaining a higher rung. Enjoy the view by all means, but don't stop long!

This is the path to Sanctity and it is one God allowed us all to be capable of following...

To complete this unit:

1. Review all of the Stage 1 Units and be conversant with your weapons and armour.
2. Identify the top 3 signs of preoccupation you have faced in the past.
3. Examine all of your current habits and establish if any are selfish to others. Can you alter them?
4. Be wary of allowing daily routines that bring you closer to your 'trigger' or preoccupation.
5. Challenge yourself to tell your mentor when you sense a dangerous preoccupation developing.

