

Would She Save Her Arm, Or Loose It?

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Get a fix? Or go to the hospital? A mother of two children, she stood on the patio in her dazed stupor, trying to decide whether to go home and get a fix or to go to the hospital to lance a life-threatening infection. Her name was Mariesol, and she was a heroin addict.

I met her on the street outside the church in Ensenada. Her hair was disheveled; her clothes, dirty. The top of her left arm was twice its normal size due to a growing infection, discoloring her skin with splotches of black and blue. Some in our group wondered if she was being beaten. Her boyfriend was also a heroin addict. In the center of her arm was a large boil-like inflammation, swollen and oozing pus. She needed to see a doctor, she told us, but she didn't have the \$10 to pay for her visit. Our team had those funds, so she climbed into our van with me and with our translator, Teresa. She hit her infected arm on the mirror as she tried to get to the van, and she was in obvious pain. The church members nearby urged us to take another man, as they were aware of Mariesol's drug connections. They warned us that we could find ourselves in danger.

As we drove her to the Red Cross clinic, I told her that I was safe, but that I needed her to tell us the truth. She told us that she was a heroin addict, using about four times per day. A worker in a Christian rehab center at our base camp told me that her addiction would cost her about \$20 per day. It almost cost this dear woman her life; it may still.

Continuing to the clinic, she said that she had fallen off a bus and injured her shoulder, which had become infected. She denied being beaten, though that is common for those in abusive situations to protect themselves from further pain being inflicted upon them by their perpetrators. When we arrived at the clinic, she closed her eyes as her body drifted gently in different directions due to the influence of the drug.

All the Red Cross could do was give her a pain shot. They didn't have the equipment or personnel to do what she needed, and they told us she needed to go to the hospital.

So there we stood, on the patio outside the Red Cross, with Mariesol trying to make up her mind. She finally allowed us to persuade her to go to the hospital. Outside in the parking lot where I had to stay with the van, I prayed with her for her healing. She was moved to tears. Her infection was so severe that the doctors said she might loose her arm and possibly her life. We had to leave her there and return to our base camp.

Teresa and I tried to visit her the next day. The doctors had lanced her arm and cleaned out the infection. They wanted to keep her in the hospital for observation for 48 more hours, but she checked herself out before we got to see her.

What makes a woman unable to see that her children need her to be their mother? What makes her unable to see that an infection could end up costing her an arm or her life? Whatever her reason for going down the path to addiction, she had let heroin become her master. She had bought into the deceptive lie that it could salve her pain. Instead, it compounded it by her allowing it to enslave her.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12 NASB95).

Apparently, the Corinthians were using the phrase, "all things are lawful for me," to justify their immorality. At issue was their liberty. In a sense, their emphasis on personal liberty was true, but they were mixing truth with falsehood. Personal liberty was not the freedom to do whatever they wanted, but it was to limit the exercise of their freedom to what served God's ultimate purposes for their lives. What serves God's purposes is "profitable" or beneficial. It is what God honors and rewards. It has ultimate eternal significance. Paul warned the Corinthians that personal liberty apart from that singular direction leads to slavery, or as he called it, being "mastered by" the very things

they thought would set them free. This was where Mariesol found herself. If we are not careful, this is where we will find ourselves.

Being "mastered by" something does not always come in the form of addictions. To be sure, many in our church, over my years of service here, have found themselves in the clutches of drugs, alcohol, pornography, sex, and the pursuit of money to the point where they were mastered by them. I've come to see some great stories of redemption—of brothers and sisters being brought out of such slavery to a newfound freedom in obedience to Christ.

But being mastered by something can happen with seemingly harmless things that can take God's rightful place in our lives. When that occurs, on the outside, it can look noble and pristine, while on the inside it is corrupt and decaying as a white-washed tomb.

Standing on that patio outside the Red Cross, Mariesol's indecision has moved me to ask myself a question. Perhaps it may move you to ask yourself the same: Is there anything in my life that is so mastering me? Are we being dominated by some passion that exceeds our own passion for God and for His purposes for our own life?

Get a fix? Or go to the hospital? Mariesol's answer was obvious to those of us with her, but she couldn't see it. She needed someone who would help her make the right decision.

I said to Mariesol, "Let us take you to the hospital." Sometimes those of us who are blinded by what we have allowed to master us need someone to give us the honest feedback and move us in the right direction, even when we are reluctant to go there.

Just like we were able to be in Ensenada for Mariesol, God has placed us in Aurora for the community around us. Grace Church Aurora is a hospital. God is the Great Physician. If you find yourself mastered by something, if you find yourself addicted, go to the hospital. If you find a friend or family member or co-worker so enslaved, ask them to let you take them to the hospital. Sometimes, they'll go back their old habits. But sometimes, someone will stay and find healing and true freedom in the Lord and through the work of His children. I've seen it lots of times at Grace Church Aurora. Hopefully, by God's doing, you will see it too!