

COMMENTARIES ON THE CHARACTERISTICS MOST OF US SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON

Characteristic 13:

Even when we got the love of another person, it never seemed enough, and we were unable to stop lusting after others.

The nature of addiction is never to be satisfied, but always to want more, no matter the cost. Our sexual compulsions, obsessive fantasies, secrecy, and low self-esteem had many consequences in our everyday lives. One of the most damaging was the reinforcement of the feeling that we were unlovable. Some of us decided to pursue intimate relationships because they seemed to offer more lasting relief from the pain we experienced from feeling inadequate, flawed, and unworthy. However, believing that no one would or could love us only increased our shame, isolation, and hopelessness. We used our compulsive behaviors as a means of getting validation and sexual gratification, but still could not escape our feelings of emptiness and unworthiness. Emotional connections, including love, were subordinate to the lust and relentless pursuit of sex that the compulsion generated. For most of us, the ability to love and accept love in return seemed entirely removed from our well-worn habit of objectifying and using people as part of our sexual compulsivity.

Despite our behaviors, there were times when someone we were interested in responded lovingly to us. Perhaps the person fell in love with the carefully-crafted image we had worked so hard to project. In other cases, they may have seen through our pain and recognized our vulnerability. They found qualities in us that we were unaware we had. Sometimes this came as a surprise since many of us had convinced ourselves that we had no intrinsic worth. We only needed to examine our past histories of sexual compulsion to find evidence of how flawed we were. Some of us were uncomfortable with the expressions of affection, caring, and love that came our way since we believed that anyone who felt these things for us must somehow be defective.

Some of us were terrified at the prospect of real closeness and began to pull away when we felt vulnerable, sometimes sabotaging the intimacy we had with sex outside the relationship. Our need for intimacy triggered sexual feelings, and our desire for sex, love, or affection was insatiable. Some of us expected that having attained the love of another, we would be free of our emptiness and finally become whole. When this failed to happen, we were disillusioned and looked for something or someone to blame. Whether we blamed ourselves or our partners, we did everything we could to extricate ourselves from the relationship that was no longer happening on our terms, or under our control.

Our need for control of any relationship conflicted with the equal exchange that most intimate relationships require. We craved closeness but also feared the

possible exposure of our lies and compulsive behaviors. In a committed relationship, some of us found, to our frustration, that we no longer desired our partner sexually. Intimacy caused anxiety, which often led us to act out with others to escape our feelings. Many of us had limited boundaries, or none at all, so as we sought validation from others, we were unable to maintain appropriate limits in our relationships. We were uncomfortable in ourselves, spiritually and emotionally empty, and believed that sex with yet another person might fill the void within us. The idea that we had to love and accept ourselves first before truly bonding with someone else had never occurred to us.

Many of us continued to lust after and fantasize about others, even when we were in a committed relationship. Sometimes we did this under the noses of our partners. We divided our attention between the person we were with and our potential next sex partner. Many of us continued to have sex with others, even when doing so was clearly inappropriate and hurtful, sometimes with friends or people known to our partner. We became proficient in deceiving ourselves and others. We felt entitled to have the sex we wanted, even as we tried to achieve the appearance of intimacy with our partner. Sometimes our indiscretions or infidelities with others cost us our relationships. We often failed to recognize that in trying to have everything, we ultimately had nothing.

For many of us, there was never enough. No amount of sex or validation, not even the love of another, could relieve our pain and emptiness. Yet we carried on with our sexual compulsion, returning to familiar patterns that had worked for us in the past. No matter which way we turned, we eventually found ourselves seeking our next sexual or romantic "fix," knowing almost from the start that it would never satisfy our compulsive needs. In this process, some of us took steps to end our current relationship, leaving us free to pursue the greener grass that we always hoped would be on the other side of the fence. These breakups were painful, but we persuaded ourselves that they were necessary in order to move on with our lives. However, with every relationship we discarded, some portion of shame remained, adding to our feelings of unworthiness, emptiness, and hopelessness.

In Recovery

We build a strong relationship with our Higher Power, filling the hole in our soul. We lose our sense of inadequacy, making it easier to have boundaries. We learn to value others, and full relationships including love. We are able to commit, and accept that any relationship has its ups and downs, ebbs and flows. We learn to appreciate and be satisfied with what we have, and recognize if it is our addiction that is creating dissatisfaction. We let go of "the disease of more." We abandon sexual intrigue, and inappropriate flirtatious or seductive behavior. We learn to recognize the siren call of the compulsion for what it is: a false promise leading only to more of the same heartache that brought us to recovery in the first place.

(Extract from "The Characteristics Most of Us Seem to Have in Common"

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