

## **Addicted to Email Love**

By Dave Sloan

First published at *Catholic Exchange*

Robert Palmer died a while back. The news saddened me. You members of the younger set might be surprised to know that his video, "Addicted to Love," was the very first big hit of the music video era. He ushered in the whole phenomenon. I never really liked that video, but I think I was addicted to it.

That video was pretty honest, I think. It didn't represent addiction to love as being exciting, or even fun, just addictive. The women in the video are not even quite alive. Addiction has sucked the very life out of them.

It's like that with all addictions. It may start out as fun, and it may continue to have certain pleasant aspects, but much of it turns out to be no fun at all.

Like my email addiction. I want someone to come into my email inbox and love me. I wind up compulsively checking my email; I wind up hitting that check email button with the inane frequency of a lab rat hitting the little button that he thinks will get the researcher to give him more cheese or cocaine or whatever it is he's been conditioned to crave.

Periodically, someone does come into my email inbox and love me. And it makes my spirits soar, makes me feel for a while as if my life is okay. Someone is interested in me; someone likes something I've done; someone wants to interact with me. Someone responds to something I've written, whether to her directly or sent to a list or published or what have you. Most of what I write, and I'm afraid most of what I do as well, is a cry for love. I confess that what I'm writing right now very much fits this description.

It does happen sometimes—BINGO!—in the email inbox. Sometimes it's someone inviting me somewhere cool like San Francisco to participate in a conference or give a talk. Sometimes it's an editor who likes some of my writing. Sometimes it is some random lost soul who connected to something I wrote or said along the way, and lets me know that it matters. That's cool. Sometimes it's an ex-girlfriend who has discovered that she never should have left me and that she does love me after all—if I could just get over the religion stuff. Sometimes it's that spirit-filled gal with the gleam in her eye I've been trying to connect to, and she's aiming her email gleam at me.

Some of these types of emails are admittedly rather rare. But they do happen often enough, just often enough, to keep me strung out on that check email button.

My life, quite often, like many people's lives I suppose, is not what I had hoped it would be. I am not the person I had hoped I would be. I spend so many hours and days and weeks and months and years doing things that don't seem to be of my own choosing. I want to be a writer but I work at construction most days and run errands and squander

time and get depressed and squander more time and then I have commitments to others which must be kept and some of those are very rewarding but as I keep them the little time I had left to write is seeping away and I try to make time to pray and sometimes I do but it is too often rather dry and lifeless prayer and I squeeze in some scripture but not enough and some exercise but not enough and somehow I've been sabotaged—I got old and racked with injuries and lost most of my big bushy head of hair and the girls don't notice me anymore, not like they used to, and Young Adult Ministries has enacted age limits that exclude geezers like me from their functions and the little time I had left for writing is getting away from me and when I do try to write I often fail and my room is a mess and my files are a mess and my finances are a mess and I don't feel up to dealing with any of it and good God how did it all turn out like this?

So, what's to be done about it all? Seek some relief. I've managed, with lots of God's grace, in spite of all the whining above, to leave behind my most nasty habits, hallelujah, so the relief channels are not what they once were. And that leaves . . . email.

I'll check my email, and maybe there'll be some love there, and that love will salve my wounds. If I only checked it once a day, I'd have decent odds, and there might be something comforting there. But, because I compulsively check it seventy-eight times a day the preponderance of the attempts are fruitless and only serve to compound my despair.

I'm addicted to love, and when my effort to indulge my addiction through email fails to satisfy, where does that leave me—trapped in a downward spiral of darkness that used to lead to pretty deep depression and some pretty sad behavior, but now it doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't have to be that way. I think Jesus gave enough love and blood on the cross to get me through this email mess. I'm sure he did. And I'm pretty well willing, in spite of all the mucked up mess of my life I'm willing, by God yes I am willing, to let Him get me out of this.

How?

You know what I think I need? I need an email prayer. If I can't stop myself from checking it compulsively, I need to habituate myself to saying a prayer when I do. That way, Satan the tempter, the liar who is beating me up with that check email button, will begin to lose much of the satisfaction of his ploy.

If his tempting me causes me to pray, he loses. If I pray when I check the email, then I am likely to find my spirit lifted up to God regardless of the contents of the inbox.

I may come to understand that my desire to find some love in that email inbox is actually God moving in my heart, drawing me to him. I don't have to repress my longing for something somehow loving there in my email inbox. I just have to learn how to complete that desire by drawing near to the one who is always the source of all love.

Maybe there's good news in my inbox, and maybe there's not—usually not. But the longing for love is always an invitation to discover the good news that I am loved. God

understands every single bit of the weepy whining stuff I spilled out a few paragraphs ago, and he loves me nonetheless. He knows me, really knows me; he knows everything that I fear would keep anyone from ever loving me. He knows about my gravest weaknesses; he knows how thin is the veneer of confidence I wear when I'm out in the world. He sees it all and knows it all and he's hopelessly in love with me. He's pouring out his love for me in every moment.

I'm being drawn toward him by my email issues. I do want some editor, seminar coordinator, dreamy, gleamy-eyed gal, ex-girlfriend who dumped me, I do want them all to send me email missives of appreciation and love. It's okay to desire that. But it's not okay to desire only or even mainly that. My desire must be multiplied; it must far exceed those natural desires, and find its home in desire for the God of Desire.

And so, as I move my mouse arrow to the bottom of the screen to click on my email program, I practice my new prayer, "God of Desire, my desire is for you." I love that prayer. It's working such wonders in my life. When I experience desire that threatens to lead toward lust, any kind of lust at all, be it lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or the pride of life [1 Jn], I no longer try to repress or turn away from that desire. I simply seek to complete it. God of Desire, my desire is for you. And it almost always sets me free.

And so I continue on and pray a bit more, "Lord I thank you for all of the ways you fulfill my desires. And I know that as I draw nearer to you, I will become more capable of allowing you to do what I know you long to do, which is to fulfill all of the longings of my heart" [Ps 37].

And then, if Satan sneers at me and sends only porn spam into my inbox, I'm ready for him. And I tell him, "Look here you freak, I know who you are. And you're nothing but a two bit, small time, back alley, carnival barker, a side-show shill. I know what you're selling and I know it's a lie. And I'm not buying. I don't desire your bait and switch frauds; I know there is no life there, nothing of love but only death and despair. And it's not death and despair I desire, but the God of life and love. And he's hooking me up. He's promised to hook me up with real love and I know he keeps his promises [Ez 36]. And I know that your name is 'the one who breaks all promises.' So, you're outta here; you wasted your time even coming around here. As a matter of fact, just to prove it, I think I'm gonna shut this whole system down and have a little peace and quiet, some time resting easy right here, in union with the one who made me this way, addicted to love.

System shutting down.

Come, Lord Jesus.