

## INTRODUCTION

Addiction. Few words are as polarizing as this word. Sides are taken and battle lines are drawn when it comes to defining and describing what addiction is. Some say it is a choice. After all, those addicted must make a choice to use the substance and put it into their bodies; no one forces them to use. Some say it is a disease that affects how the brain works. It changes the way the brain functions and the way decisions are made. Some, like myself, say it's both a disease and a choice. I agree with addiction specialist Dr. Kevin McCauley, who defines addiction as “a disease of choice” in his documentary *Pleasure Unwoven*.<sup>1</sup>

No matter which side you fall on, the results of addiction are always the same. Addiction breaks lives. It devastates the lives of those who suffer from addictions. Plans are lost and dreams die. Addiction makes it easier for people to believe the lies about who they are—their worth and value. Addiction strips them of any sense of dignity or self-respect. Many begin to think that this life of pain and

misery is all there is and all they deserve. They lose hope for a better life. For some, addiction becomes their only option to deal with life's uncertainty, pain, and heartache.

Addiction breaks the relationships between those who suffer from addictions and their family members and friends. Trust is lost because people who suffer from addiction often break their promises to get clean, which causes additional heartache. Some steal from family members and friends, and most all of us take advantage of people in order to feed our addiction. Family members and friends become objects used by those who suffer from addictions to get what they want, when they want it, where they want it, and how they want it. The self-centered attitude of those who suffer from addiction drives many people away because they can't take it anymore. It hurts too much to be around those who suffer from addictions.

I work as a licensed addiction counselor (LAC) and licensed professional counselor (LPC) seeing firsthand how addiction breaks people on a daily basis. Seeing the broken lives of men and women who suffer from addiction is difficult to watch. Listening to the stories of lives lost and relationships broken, as well as the disheartening stories of abandonment and isolation breaks my heart. Sometimes it makes me feel like I want to quit—just throw my hands up and walk away. But I know I can't because of what God has done for me personally. He loves all those who suffer from addictions.

My own journey into addiction started early. I was sexually abused and introduced to pornography at a young age. I became addicted to pornography by the time I was in junior high school. I also believed I wasn't good enough for anyone, so I spiraled into a cycle of shame that crippled me.

I believed I couldn't measure up to anyone's expectations, so why try? Yet, I still had to try. If I succeeded, then I always managed to sabotage it; thus, proving I was the failure I believed I was. When I failed, it served to reinforce what I already believed about myself. This led me into a cycle where I feared I would never achieve success or have healthy relationships; this fear addiction was all consuming! Over the years, I developed many more addictions that forced me into a life of isolation.

I was oblivious to my addictions for many years. I couldn't understand why others found what they wanted in life (so I thought) and I couldn't. I wondered why all my relationships with women fell apart. I always felt unloved, rejected, and abandoned by those who mattered most. I was a "once a month friend" for so many people; it felt like no one wanted me around.

Eventually I got married and had a family, but that didn't stop my addictions. I declared bankruptcy (and dragged my family down with me) because of my addiction to the fear of not being good enough. This mind-set crippled me and almost destroyed my family.

There were many who saw what I was doing and spoke up, but I didn't listen to them. I hurt so many well-intentioned people, but I couldn't see what I was doing to them. Eventually I gave up on myself too, because it seemed everyone else had. But there was One who didn't give up on me. That someone was, and still is, God.

Even though I had devastated my life and those around me, God never gave up on me. He continued to pursue me, even when I didn't pursue Him. God's love for me, His grace, and His mercy, carried me through the worst of times.

God brought me to a point where I had to face myself—my addictions, fear, and shame. My journey into recovery started in 1995. I went to a conference in Toronto with a friend. It was there that I started to accept I was addicted to many things. Since then, the road has been long and hard, but well worth it. There have been many relapses and ups and downs, but through it all I have been able to find the life I've been looking for.

I've learned that the life I have longed for can only be found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God's grace and mercy, as expressed in the Gospel, friends, family, and my counselors, has helped me find a life I never thought I could or would. Through the Gospel I have found a life of meaning, value, and worth. God is continually teaching me about His love for me and is helping me learn to accept the love of others. I'm constantly reminded that I have inherent value, worth, and dignity because God has created me in His image.

Unfortunately, this is not the story many of us who suffer from addictions learn or hear. Too often, the story we hear is that we have no value or worth. Many times the words we hear are: "send them to detox," "Send them to rehab" or "Send them to jail. Let's just get rid of them." Many times family members and friends give up on us because they can't bear the pain we bring into their lives. They lose any hope that we can or might change. Sometimes they wonder if we even want to change.

Society, hospitals, law enforcement, and sometimes even the church can treat those who suffer from addictions with disrespect. Many ERs look at caring for the intoxicated homeless as wasted bed space. Police become hardened as they try to admit intoxicated individuals into a

detox facility. Officers withstand so much abuse from belligerent people, especially physical, that they become numbed to the people they are transporting. Many churches won't work with the homeless or those who suffer from addictions for fear of them "stinking up the joint." They can't see the person behind the stench.

Family members and friends are not immune either. They tire of hoping for a change that never comes and the empty promises that become our standard practice. Many grow weary and don't know what to do to help. Everything they try fails to bring change. Many well-meaning people throw up their hands and say, "To hell with you. I can't take it anymore." They cut off contact because of the hurt and pain. They want to believe in their loved one's or friend's recovery, but the reality of the situation leaves them hopeless.

I feel God urged me to write this book to provide a sense of hope for all who suffer from addictions. The Gospel contains God's response to those who suffer from addictions and those affected by it. God's answer is His mercy, grace, and love expressed in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

God's heart breaks over the broken lives, pain, guilt, and shame we all suffer. He longs for us to know how much He loves us and wants us to return home—like the prodigal son Jesus spoke of in Luke 15:11–32. In this parable, the son decides to leave and follow his own way (addictions, if you will). He goes through a series of hard times and comes to the realization that what he thought he wanted doesn't satisfy him. Eventually, he decides to go home, but as a servant, not a son. The father sees him and rejoices in his return. He refuses to see him as a servant, but as his son.

He throws a huge party, adorns the son in his best clothes, and celebrates his return. The father still sees his son through the eyes of a parent, full of compassion and forgiveness. He isn't judging the mistakes of his son's past; he sees the potential in him.

God is our father. He is patiently waiting for us to come to our senses and return home. He wants to wrap His loving arms around us and let us know how much He loves us and desires a relationship with us. Jesus said in Luke 15:10 there is joy in God's presence when one repents and comes home.

I firmly believe the Gospel offers the one thing for all who suffer from addiction—hope. The Gospel is more than a story of forgiveness. The Gospel offers the redemption and restoration we all long for. It details the story of God, who created all things, suffered the pain of watching His creation become separated from Him through sin, and showcases the great lengths He went through to restore this relationship.

The Gospel offers hope of a new life that we desperately crave and were created for. Life can be different. We don't have to continue to live the same lives we have always lived because of our addictions.

The second reason I wrote this book is to describe how the Gospel meets the deepest needs of men and women who suffer from addiction. The Gospel is the road to the hope and healing that we long for and desperately want to find.

Chapter one examines a few questions: What is addiction? How does it work? How does it affect people?

In chapter two, we take a look at God's love for His creation and us. The foundation of the Gospel is God's love for us and His creation.

In chapter three, we take a look at what it means to be created in God's image, which is the foundation for our value, worth, and dignity. The Gospel holds out hope for restoration of who we are meant to be.

The Gospel also speaks to the brokenness of our world and our relationships. But how did everything become so broken? In chapter four, we examine how this happened and the consequences of sin.

God's remedy to the consequences of sin is found in the Gospel. In chapter five, we look at His solution and how we can take hold of it.

The Gospel promises we won't stay the same after accepting Jesus' forgiveness. In chapter six, we look at some of the most important changes we experience in our new lives.

Chapter seven reveals who is with us on this new journey of life. The Gospel promises we don't have to experience our new life alone.

As you read this book, my prayer is that you will begin to view those who suffer from addiction as men and women who are in need of God's mercy, grace, and hope. I want you to see them as people in need of connection to God, others, and themselves.

I also pray that it might be a source of hope for you. My hope is this book will give you a new understanding of the Gospel. The Gospel delivers good news to those who suffer from addiction and offers the ultimate source of hope. God's view of those who suffer from addiction is not one of judgement and condemnation, but rather one of love and desire for relationship. I hope this book can become a useful tool in sharing the hope we have in Christ. Forgive-

ness, redemption, and restoration are possible. It's not just a dream; it's for everyone.

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## Scripture References

### **Luke 15:11–32**

And He said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them. “And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” ’ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a

long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has*

*begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.”

**Luke 15:10**

“In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”