

PART IV: ADDICTION—RECOVERY, PREVENTION, AND HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

RECOVERY

The information I share about recovery from addiction comes from my own personal experiences with my family and friends. I am not a trained professional. I am simply a concerned mother and citizen.

Everything I have learned about recovery from addiction I have learned the hard way—one principle at a time.

I have talked to many professionals. I have sat through many therapy sessions and self-help groups. I have listened to many lectures.

I have talked to many parents. I have cut out many magazine and newspaper articles. I have read many books.

I have talked to many teenagers. I have walked through many hospitals and rehabilitation centers. I have visited many jails.

Gradually, over the years I began to form my own opinions as to what really works and what doesn't work. I finally came to the conclusion that people must have Five Elements of Recovery in their lives to break free from the cycle of addiction:

The Five Elements of Recovery are:

1. Faith in God
2. Desire to Change
3. Accountability
4. Family Love
5. Friends with Integrity

I believe all five of these elements are essential to recovery. With all five of them, there will eventually be success. Without all five of them, recovery will be much more difficult.

When people consistently exercise faith in God's healing power, have the desire to change, take accountability for their actions, learn how to give and receive unconditional family love, and only associate with friends with integrity who don't use alcohol or drugs, they can break free from the bondage of their addictions and become the people they truly want to be.

1. Faith in God

Lacking faith and having feelings of bitterness or unworthiness keep people who are addicted from ever tapping into the greatest source of strength there is around them—Faith in God's healing power. Once you experience God's power, you will never forget it. Once you embrace God's power, you will never want to let it go.

2. Desire to Change

The desire to change must come from within. No one can force another person to change. The physical and emotional suffering that comes from addiction often instills the desire to change. Equally important, there must be hope. People who are addicted must know there really is a way back through Jesus Christ, who will really help them change their lives.

3. Accountability

Willpower alone is usually not enough to heal people's addictions. If you are addicted, find a mentor, professional counselor, or some type of structured program with people who will hold you accountable as you learn how to make necessary changes in your life. Report back to these people as you set and achieve your personal goals for sobriety.

4. Family Love

Unconditional love within families is vital. No matter how hurt and rejected your family members might feel, you all need to learn how to love and forgive one another. Love from your family does not mean enabling you or being codependent. Love means radiating real affection from the heart. You will recover faster from your addictions if you will love your family members and receive love from them in return.

5. Friends with Integrity

One of the hardest trials people who are addicted have to face is finding new, strong friends who do not use alcohol and drugs and who will support them in their recovery. Saying good-bye to old friends and habits may leave people feeling lonely and vulnerable, but, like a snake shedding its old skin, it must be done.

Individual self-worth can be restored, friendships can be mended, and families can become strong once again.

Using the Album *Wings of Glory: Songs of Hope and Healing from Addiction* for Recovery

I want to address this section of the book to any person who is suffering from addiction at this time.

Although I have not had to personally face the difficulties of drug and alcohol addiction, my heart goes out to the many wonderful people I've known throughout my life—family members, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances—who have had to deal with the pain of their own addictions on a daily basis.

It is my prayer that the songs from *Wings of Glory* will give you the desire to change. I know change is usually a gradual process, and relapse sometimes happens, but I encourage you to never give up—no matter how many times you may have tried and failed.

After listening to this album, if you have even a spark of hope that you can be healed from your addictions someday, I will feel that all of our family's efforts have been worthwhile. I know as you push forward with faith and implement the principles taught in this book, that you can still lead a productive and fulfilling life.

Music has proven effective in helping people heal from many types of major health issues, both mental and physical. If you are addicted, the simple act of listening to inspiring music can be a valuable therapy tool as you seek true freedom from addiction.

The album *Wings of Glory* is not an end-all, cure-all. You may need a rehabilitation center or halfway house. You may need to find a good doctor and the right medication. You may need the help of a support group. You may need to get individual counseling. Be humble and willing to accept direction in your life. Continually pray for the right people to come into your life who can guide you. Most people can't recover by themselves. If you need help, ask for it.

Recovery is an individual journey. No one can make you take the journey. No one can take the journey for you. It is completely up to you. You must be willing to keep trying, and trying, and trying. But always remember, you are not alone. There are people who care about you and can help you if you will do your part.

Each of the twelve songs on this album has a special message for you, but the most important message of *Wings of Glory* is that your Heavenly Father loves you. No matter what you have done, no matter what mistakes you have made, no matter how bad you have messed up your life, you must believe that you are still of great worth in the sight of your Father in Heaven. He truly loves you.

Never forget the eternal truth that you are a child of God.

Our Heavenly Father knew that we would all make mistakes and need help in purifying our lives so we could return to His presence after our earth-life experience is finished. That is why he sent His son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins. Our Savior loves you with all his heart.

He will make your sins “as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18) through your sincere repentance and the miracle of His grace.

There is a spiritual power in these songs that is intended to help you increase your faith in God, instill in you a desire to change, and give you the confidence that you can build a new life for yourself.

Suggestions for Parents—Dealing with Addiction

Twenty Suggestions for Families and Friends

Although many years have now passed since my husband and I went through the heart-wrenching, horrible experiences with our son, Jonathan, during his early years of addiction, it still reduces me to tears when I think about all the pain and agony we experienced as a family. While I don't like remembering these things, I'm willing to talk about the problems we had with the hope that others will not make the same mistakes we did.

While the suggestions I give apply specifically to parents who have children abusing drugs and alcohol, they may also be helpful to the families of those suffering from any kind of addiction or compulsive behavior. While the faces and ages may vary considerably within the scene of

addiction, the family problems every family has to deal with are predictable. Whenever there is addiction, everyone suffers.

We've been asked many times if we were in denial about our son's drug use. The answer is, "Of course we were in denial." If we couldn't see it, it must not be happening, right? Wrong.

When I would lie awake at night trying to comprehend the insanity going on in our home, I would try to understand what other people were telling us, but it was impossible. My heart simply could not accept what my mind refused to believe.

The classic signs of substance abuse were all there—the change in my son's appearance, the change in friends, the problems at school and decline in grades, the continual disruptions at home, the secretive life. I attributed all these signs to adolescence and my son's desire for independence. It didn't seem possible that he would reject everything his father and I had tried to teach him.

Neither my husband nor I had ever smoked a cigarette or had a drink of alcohol or tried drugs. We just cheerfully followed the religious teachings we had been raised with and thought we had taught our children to do the same. We didn't have the personal experience or the coping skills to deal with something so totally foreign to our way of life.

We found out that drugs could be hidden anywhere. Secret hideouts were created in the most unlikely places inside or outside our home. Slowly we came to realize that our home was really not the protective, safe haven we had so diligently tried to create for ourselves and our children. The happy home environment we desired had been destroyed.

Fortunately, a "druggie" lifestyle can only be hidden for so long. Eventually, a person does hit a bottom—even temporarily—and parents do find out what's been going on. For us, our son was experimenting with drugs and alcohol for about two years before our eyes were finally opened. We could not believe all the deceit that had gone on behind our backs.

The escalating drama of the druggie lifestyle, which we were being pulled into so unwillingly, seemed unreal. One frightening night, a police officer showed up at our door asking to see our son. I found out later that as I was walking up the stairs to tell him to come down he hurriedly flushed his drugs down the toilet and jumped out his second-story bedroom window. Then he ran away and hid for several days. This kind of emotional turmoil continued for years.

I now encourage other parents to watch for both the classic signs of alcohol and drug abuse and also the subtle, hidden signs. *If you see any signs at all, believe them.* Do not do as we did. We just tried to continue living a "normal" life, like ostriches with our heads in the sand, hoping that the insanity would go away if we simply ignored it. We finally learned that a drug problem doesn't go away by itself.

Addiction is a terrible, progressive disease, but it's not an *individual* disease. *It is a family disease.* Whether we liked it or not, or believe it or not, the disease of addiction had an enormous, negative impact on every member of our family. It was a challenge we had to face together.

When talking about addiction, the issue of young people smoking cigarettes should not be minimized or overlooked. Nicotine is called a “gateway” drug because it is often the drug kids try first—and then it leads them to drinking alcohol and trying other drugs. Sadly, nicotine is often the last drug people are able to quit. Smoking cigarettes is a hard habit to break. Jonathan, who has been addicted to the hardest drugs, has said that the most difficult drug to get off of is nicotine.

If you find out your kids are smoking, drinking, or doing drugs, keep expressing your love to them, but do take a firm stand. Show concern for their physical and emotional health, and try to help them devise a plan to stop.

It is important to reach out and talk to other parents who have already dealt with addiction in the home and seek advice from good counselors and other professionals. Adolescence can be such a confusing time. Be the source of strength that your child needs you to be, and act like a mature adult, not an angry adolescent yourself.

Hindsight is always a great teacher, but sadly, hindsight doesn’t take away the emotional pain caused by making bad decisions. We learned the hard way that we should never make decisions when we were feeling stressed and upset. My counsel to other parents is to try not to overreact, like we usually did. When faced with challenges within your family, try to stay calm, look at things from a long-term perspective, and make decisions wisely—not in haste.

Take time to pray about your many decisions, and be sure to get a good night’s sleep before making all major decisions. During the night, or in the early morning hours, you will often receive inspiration that will prompt you to go in the right direction. You can’t think clearly when you are angry, anxious, or depressed. You need a cooling-off period to make good decisions for yourself and your family. Through prayer, all correct decisions will be accompanied by a confirming feeling of peace. You will know what is right to do.

I wish I’d known many years ago everything I’ve learned about dealing with all the issues parents have to face when they find out their child is abusing alcohol and drugs—but maybe now I can help someone who is walking this path. These are twenty suggestions I would like to share.

1. Do not panic. When you’re emotionally distraught, you’re more likely to make rash decisions for your child and yourself that you will later regret. Try to replace the labels you might have put on your child—such as “bad” with “sad”—and you’ll do better keeping the drug issue in its proper perspective and maintaining your emotional equilibrium. In reality, your child who is addicted is dealing with great emotional turmoil, and possibly even physical pain, and needs help. You must always remind yourself to stay calm.

2. Do not blame yourself. You aren’t responsible for all of your children’s successes, nor for all of their failures. While you can contribute to both, children are responsible for the choices they make. Always remember—you didn’t cause it, you can’t control it, and you can’t cure it. As a parent, your job is to let your children own the consequences of their choices. At the same time, you must be an anchor for them so they will be able to come back to you when they sincerely want help. Focus on the things you have done right as a parent and don’t dwell on the things you might have done wrong. Just try to do a little better each day.

3. Do not make excuses or shield from the law. It's better to let your children suffer the consequences of their behavior while they're under the age of eighteen and can still be tried under juvenile law. Once they turn eighteen, they'll be tried as adults. The consequences they'll receive will be much more severe, and their criminal record will be permanent. Be aware of how you enable your children. Enabling, or continuing to allow, your children's irresponsible or illegal behavior not only prolongs the misery for you, but also for them. Don't protect them from being fully responsible for their actions. If your children are already adults, don't rescue them. They won't change their behavior until they learn to be responsible by being held accountable for the choices they are making.

4. Learn all you can about the disease of addiction. Knowledge is power. Learn about addiction and the many different philosophies regarding recovery. AA and Al-Anon use the original 12-step program and have enlightening literature, as do advocates of entirely different points of view. Reading about addiction from first-hand experience is especially touching and insightful, and there are many biographies written by former drug addicts. I believe there are many ways to recover from addiction. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another. The Internet is a great resource for learning about addiction and now has many educational and informative websites available. Take the time to read and learn.

5. Get professional help. As with any type of problem, overcoming addiction will be much faster the sooner you start working on the steps to recovery. There are government agencies and many qualified doctors, counselors, and social workers who are trained in this field today and can help educate you on how to deal with addiction's complex issues. When there is addiction in the family, everyone in the family is affected in one way or another, and the whole family needs help. It is important to discuss your family problems with a counselor who is well trained in the area of addiction. Be aware that there are many different types of counselors. Look around until you find the one that you feel is best for your family. A qualified counselor can look at all the family dynamics going on between the parents and the child who is addicted and give valuable suggestions from an outside point of view. It is imperative for the whole family to learn how to open up lines of communication and really share their honest feelings. Not only do you need to openly discuss your fears and frustrations, but everyone in the family needs an opportunity to express their feelings and opinions. You need to be willing to listen to your children's points of view whether you agree with them or not. Your children will feel more valued and respected when you take the time to really listen to what they are thinking and feeling. This is where the guidance of a good family counselor is so important. But, do not ever blindly accept the advice given by a family counselor. Think carefully about all the advice you receive, and then be discerning about what changes you want to implement in your home.

6. Choose your rehabilitation program carefully. Rehabilitation programs do have some benefits, but putting your child into a short-term or long-term program is not a decision that should be made in haste. It not only affects the child who is addicted, but it affects everyone in the family. We learned that even if you are in a crisis situation your child can be admitted to a hospital or kept in another safe place while you take time to consider your options. There are some good, structured rehabilitation programs, but there are also some bad ones. Not all programs are what they appear to be on the surface. Some programs may acquaint your child with a whole new group of addicts. You have to weigh all the risks. A bad program has the potential of leaving your child with deep, long-lasting emotional scars. While all programs teach

basic recovery principles, they may also be expensive, time consuming, and very disruptive to family life. If you have other children, you must take their needs into consideration also. They still need your time and attention. Try the less invasive programs first. Gradually go up the ladder of available programs when seeking help for your child and your family. Talk to others who have used the program you are interested in, and then carefully discern which program is right for your family.

7. Find a support group and ask for help. You cannot meet all of your needs alone. There is real power in some type of support group. As you cry and laugh together, you'll comfort and strengthen one another in a way that can only happen with people who understand your pain. You may find support from community groups such as Al-Anon or ToughLove®, or informal groups such as friends, relatives, or church members who have gone through similar experiences. I found the AA 12 Steps, sayings and slogans, and Serenity Prayer, to be useful tools in gaining some peace and clarity back into my life when I was first introduced to them years ago. It will probably be difficult to learn how to accept and love the person who has caused so much pain in your family. A strong support system will help you set your own boundaries so that you don't get stepped on, but also allow you to start living and loving once again. Addiction causes isolation. While your child who is addicted may choose to isolate from you right now, you must not isolate from your family and friends. Your children will see your example of gaining strength and moving forward in life and may be more willing to find the support they need to break through their own fears and reconnect with your family.

8. Use intervention. While it is true that most people will not stop abusing drugs and alcohol until they hit bottom, you can sometimes bring that bottom "up" with a carefully planned intervention that involves family members, friends, and trained professionals. Work as a team to confront your children and intervene in their lives when necessary. While your children may initially hate you for intervening, they may thank you one day. Often times, they know deep down inside that they are ruining their lives, but they don't know how to get out of the whirlpool that is pulling them under. While you might make some mistakes in trying to help them, I believe it is better to do something than to do nothing. Hopefully over the years, your children will understand the love, dedication, and courage it took for you to take a firm stand and intervene in their lives.

9. Improve your self-esteem. The common denominator among all people who are addicted is not economic status, race, religion, intelligence, education, or family size. The common denominator is low self-esteem. While you cannot give your child high self-esteem, you can be a role model. If you suffer from low self-esteem, look at your own feelings of inadequacy, which may be masked behind some type of self-defeating behavior. When you don't feel good about yourself, you sometimes quietly withdraw or ridicule and criticize others in an effort to make yourself feel better and then find yourself alienated from your family and friends. But, you can change. Be aware of your own compulsive behaviors (which we all seem to have) and work on your personal recovery. Begin to appreciate yourself for who you are. Accept your weaknesses but focus on your strengths. Learn to be more honest with your feelings and share them with your children. They will learn from your example. Feeling like you can be honest with those you love builds trust, and gives both you and them the freedom to really be yourselves. As you all become more "real" with each other, everyone's self-esteem will improve dramatically.

10. Build personal and family relationships. By the time you discover your child is using drugs, your family relationships are most likely hanging by a thread. Usually communication has broken down, animosity and anger are filling the home, and no one likes being together anymore. As the parent, you must be the one to break the cycle. Stop being angry and start being nice. You can begin by taking a deep breath, smiling, and using a pleasant tone of voice. Let less important issues slide. Look for the good in your child, and focus on the positive. You have the power to change the emotional climate of your home. Using manipulation, intimidation, coercion, or force to try and control your child's behavior will never work. Look for golden opportunities to talk to your children when they are receptive—no matter what time of day or night. Share your love and feelings with them when the emotional climate is right. Go on one-on-one “dates” with them. Listen more than you talk. You may hear things you would prefer not to hear; but if you want to get to know your children, bite your tongue and let them express themselves. Each positive experience you have with your child will add another thread of strength to your relationship, and family solidarity will gradually return.

11. Be patient. The personal problems that contributed to the drug experimentation and addiction did not appear overnight, and they will not disappear overnight. In the world we live in today, we expect everything to happen fast. Because of the complex issues that go along with addiction, there is no “quick fix.” You can't take an antibiotic, get well in a week, and resume your normal life. Addiction affects every area of one's life: the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social. To heal completely, each of these areas needs to be addressed—one at a time. Healing from addiction is a gradual process that requires a lifestyle change not only for the individual, but for the whole family as well. Learn to accept the reality that now faces your family. There will be times when you will want to give up because you cannot see real progress, but do not be discouraged. Each time your children fall back into old patterns of behavior, they do not become weaker. Their distressing feelings of regret will actually strengthen their resolve to do it right the next time. Eventually, they can make it. The most important thing to remember about your children's recovery is that you cannot do it for them. The only person you can really change is yourself. Be a role model for your children. Let them see the everyday happiness you enjoy because of your choice to live a drug-free life.

12. Take care of yourself. Your personal pain and sorrow can fill you with such overwhelming despair that you will not be able to function unless you find an outlet that will help you heal. Resist being codependent. Don't be so caught up with taking care of others, or trying to control them, that you forget to take care of yourself. Praying and reading the scriptures will quietly strengthen you, ease your emotional pain, and help you see things more clearly and realistically. One thing I did for my outlet was to continue with my hobby of songwriting. I put the emotional pain and loss I was feeling into every song I wrote. I focused on how these songs would someday help other people stay away from drugs. I also kept attending church and gained great spiritual strength from worshipping God and seeing my supportive friends who were there. I forced myself to stay involved in different types of activities. I continued to go forward with our family traditions, even though our family was in chaos at the time. The security from these traditions became an anchor to me and helped me have the necessary emotional stability that I needed to take care of the rest of my family.

13. Get a complete medical and psychological evaluation for your child. Because there is often an underlying physical or psychiatric problem that contributes to children's addictions, it is

essential that they receive thorough medical and psychological evaluations. Some children self-medicate by using alcohol and drugs in order to deal with their continual feelings of depression, anxiety, fatigue, or some other type of health problem. Of course, this only makes their problems worse. Not everyone is in favor of using psychiatric medications, but I believe they are sometimes necessary—if only for a short period of time. When the appropriate medication is combined with good counseling, it can be extremely helpful and therapeutic. Many young people don't want the stigma of going to a counselor or using psychiatric medication, but it's a much better alternative than dealing with the serious consequences of drug abuse. With a little time and research, you may be able to find some natural ways of treating physical or psychiatric problems without the use of medication through nutrition, exercise, or other alternative therapies. The most important thing is to do something—don't ignore medical or psychiatric problems.

14. Be less controlling and more consistent. No matter how much you may want to completely control your children's lives, you can't. Children have lives of their own. They think their own thoughts, feel their own feelings, struggle with their own insecurities, and fear their own uncertain futures. Regardless of what you do or don't do, they will all eventually grow up, turn eighteen, and have the liberty to walk out your front door, live independently, and do as they please. Instead of just trying to control your children now, try to teach them self-control. Through the use of well-thought-out logical or natural consequences, they can eventually learn to be responsible for their own behavior. In the real world, every choice has a consequence. In your home, it should be the same. Make the firm rule that using drugs and alcohol is never allowed. Have consequences in place ahead of time, and follow through consistently whenever that rule is broken. There are many good books written on this subject that can teach you how to use natural or logical consequences (See Appendix).

15. Set your own boundaries. Children who use drugs often try to control the family through their angry outbursts or passive manipulation. They want everything to revolve around them. As the parent, you have to take charge of your own house. While you can't control their behavior, you can control your own behavior and set your personal boundaries of what you will and will not do. Your life doesn't have to stop because your child is acting out. There is no need to drop everything because unrealistic demands are being placed on you. Express your love to your child, but go on with your life.

16. Pray to know what is right for your home. One of the hardest decisions you will have to make as a parent is if you are going to allow your child who is using drugs to live in your home. There are many differing opinions on this subject, and I don't think there is one right answer. It is my opinion, that if children are under the age of eighteen, you should try to work with them in your home the best you can. If you have other children living at home, it will be difficult to explain to them why a rebellious sibling doesn't have to follow the same rules they do. But, try to help them understand that a sibling who is addicted needs family support right now. Only through prayer will you come to know what is right for your family. But, you need to make sure your answer is coming from the Lord and not from your emotional heart strings that are being influenced by a rebellious, manipulative child. Always remember, if you feel like you are being manipulated, you are. If children who are using drugs try to abuse their siblings in any way, they should not be allowed to stay. You must always protect any other children who are living in your home at all costs. Children over the age of eighteen should be treated like adults. If family rules

are not being followed, they should not be allowed to live in your home until they agree to do so. If they break the rules, they should be asked to leave immediately.

17. Empower yourselves as the parents. When you find out that your child is abusing alcohol or drugs, you need to quickly think through a plan as to how you're going to deal with the problem. If possible, don't interrupt children's education, but if they are only going to school to obtain or use drugs and are failing their classes anyway, it may be necessary to remove them from that environment and the influence of their friends. Encourage your child to attend community drug awareness classes, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings, or other type of support group. Stop giving any type of allowance or financial help—most likely the money will be spent on drugs anyway. You can also withhold what I call "house privileges" such as using the car, cell phone, television, radio, i-pod, computer, or Internet. If these restrictions don't work, you may need to research and find an acceptable short-term rehabilitation program. If you ever feel threatened, do not hesitate to call the police. The safety of you and your family is your first priority. Keep the phone number of police in a visible place. Your child needs to know that the police department is one of your community resources for maintaining peace and order in your home. The strong message you must send to your child is that the use of alcohol and drugs is illegal, and will not be tolerated. As the parent, you must devise a plan, stay in control, and follow through with what you say you are going to do.

18. Accept the worst-case possibilities. Despite doing all you can do as parents, sometimes addiction leads to prison, disappearance, or death. If this should happen in your family, get outside support to help sustain you during this devastating time. Visiting your child in jail or prison is a heart-wrenching experience, but pray for the strength to handle it. Love can still be expressed while sitting in a large room in the company of other inmates behind a heavy, locked metal door or by talking on a telephone while looking through a glass window that separates you from your child. It's important to do what your heart tells you to do as you maintain contact with them when they are locked up. Remember the scripture, I was in prison and ye came unto me (Matthew 25:36). When children disappear, and you don't know if they are dead or alive, all you can do is pray and ask God to take over. There were many months when Jonathan was either living on the streets or choosing to avoid us, and we didn't know if we would ever see him alive again. All we could do was keep hoping and praying that wherever he was that he would be safe. Thankfully, our belief in a life after death brought us a small measure of peace. We knew that through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, that even if Jonathan did die, he would also be resurrected someday, and we could be reunited as a family. Complete faith in God and reliance upon our dear Savior became our anchor. We had nothing else to hold on to during those uncertain years that were filled with such great, lingering sadness.

19. Keep an open door. If your children who are addicted are not living at home, help them understand that while you do not approve of their choices and behaviors, you still love them with all your heart. Invite them over for dinner and to family activities when they are sober. Let them feel that they are still an important part of your family unit. However, if you believe your children who use drugs are a danger to your family or to others, they should not be invited to your home. Visit with them somewhere else that you consider to be safe.

20. If you are married, take time to nurture your relationship. Finding out you have a child who is addicted not only puts a strain on your family, it has the capability of driving a wedge

between you and your spouse and tearing your marriage apart. Don't let this happen. Each parent has to deal with the truth about their child in his or her own way, and it's not going to be easy. Most likely, the dreams you have had for this child since birth are now being shattered, and you probably won't be able to handle it very well at first. You may both need time to grieve in your own way until you can reach a level of acceptance. But, all is not lost. As time goes by, there will be new dreams and a new relationship developed with your child. While it may be difficult, never give up hope for building a new future with your child. As you visualize it and pray for it, it can someday happen. In the meantime, you have to hold on to each other. Since you know realistically that neither of you are responsible for your child's choices, don't waste time blaming the other person. The best thing you can do for each other is to have a weekly date where you can go somewhere and be alone. Relive your dating days and the things you used to enjoy doing together, and reminisce about your lives before you assumed the role of being a parent. Forget all the existing stresses and worries of parenthood for a few hours, and try to emotionally and spiritually reconnect with each other once again. When you return home, you will be able to think more clearly and be better prepared as a couple to make the necessary decisions regarding your child. When you are united in all the decisions you make, your child will usually be more understanding and accepting of your boundaries. With your emotional and spiritual reservoir refilled, you will be strengthened as you care for any other children you might have and try to nurture each other on a daily basis. We have also found it helpful to go on an occasional overnight date every three or four months to relax, have fun, and really communicate together. Building a loving, happy marriage during these raging storms of conflict is not easy, but it is worth the effort. A strong, unified marriage will help build a strong, unified family.

Finally . . .

I know we made every mistake in the book with Jonathan—except one. We never stopped loving him. We are grateful that he lived as long as he did—to the age of thirty-five. We had a close relationship. We continue to pray every day for Christ's healing power to be with our whole family.

What I would tell everyone to remember is simply this—you are not alone. There are many of us who have been where you are today. There are many of us who will come after you. But if we can join together courageously in this war against drugs, we will someday win. I am sure of it.

I have developed a self-help addiction recovery program called, "Wings of Glory Recovery Program" that you or someone you love might benefit from using.

PREVENTION

Five Elements of Prevention

I know the pain that echoes sorrowfully in the hearts and souls of everyone who has ever had to deal with the crisis of addiction. The initial stage of drug experimentation needs to be prevented. The old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," has never been more true than when it comes to preventing the devastation of drug abuse.

I heard the “The Ambulance Down in the Valley” poem in church when I was a teenager, and the message of this analogy always stayed with me: “It’s better to build a fence at the top of the cliff than to send an ambulance to the valley.” The vicious valley of addiction is full of good people who have made bad decisions. These people went after the thrill of climbing onto the dangerous cliffs of experimenting with alcohol and drugs, but their fate was doomed from the start. With little or no warning, they suddenly fell off the cliffs of experimentation down into the valley of addiction, where they often continue suffering for years. Ambulances get paid to pick them up, but the problem is never solved. Our communities need to build strong fences of alcohol and drug prevention.

Because of what our family has had to endure while dealing with the issues of addiction, I have pondered a great deal about how to teach the subject of prevention. I came to understand that the five elements needed for recovery could also be modified and used proactively for prevention.

The Five Elements of Prevention are:

1. Faith in God
2. Desire for Change
3. Accountability
4. Family Love
5. Friends with Integrity

The Five Elements of Prevention can be used to avoid the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. If you implement these five elements into your life when you are young, you will grow up with a strong, internal fence to keep you far away from the dangerous cliffs of addiction.

1. Faith in God

Everyone needs to believe that there is a real purpose to life and that you are not alone in this world. There is a spiritual power that you can tap into each day as you turn to God during your personal trials. As you take time to pray, study the scriptures, listen to songs about Jesus Christ, and write in a daily journal, you will receive the spiritual guidance that you need to deal with the challenges in your life.

2. Desire for Change

Assume full responsibility for all your choices by avoiding people, places, and things that could lead to addiction. Read and discuss books about drug prevention with your family and friends, and take time to enjoy life’s natural highs. Get help from others when dealing with the stresses and pressures around you instead of substituting a quick, temporary, addictive relief that always brings you down in the end.

3. Accountability

The best way to keep free of all addictions is to be completely involved in other worthwhile activities that you really enjoy doing. Counsel with a mentor, who can be a trusted family member, reliable friend, or professional counselor, to help set personal goals and then report back on your progress each week.

4. Family Love

A family is made up of imperfect people bound together with fragile strings of love. Be sensitive to each other's feelings and let each family member know that they are accepted and appreciated for who they are. Help each family member feel needed, cared for, and cherished because everyone in the family needs to feel a sense of belonging.

5. Friends with Integrity

Friends who are strong and loyal are important because everyone likes feeling included in a good group. Friends who share similar interests and moral values will help you keep your commitments to yourself. If you have concerns about some of your friends, talk to someone you can trust and figure out a way to leave bad friends behind as you find good friends you can trust and make a fresh start in life.

Using the Album *Wings of Glory* for Prevention

The album, *Wings of Glory: Songs of Hope and Healing from Addiction*, is a much-needed tool of prevention with messages that are profound and persuasive. Through the power of this music you can gain a greater understanding of the harsh reality and enduring agony of life as an addict. You will also come to feel the love of God in your life and your own great individual worth.

The purpose of this music is to help you live your life happily without drugs or other artificial highs. After feeling its inspiration, you will never see drugs and alcohol the same way again. You will begin to desire the "natural high" from God's love that never lets you down.

After listening to these songs, you will begin to understand the consequences of drug addiction and gain an inner strength and resolve to never even experiment with drugs. Your ability to always resist negative peer pressure will increase. High self-esteem will naturally grow as you develop faith in God, gain a desire to avoid all addictions, be accountable for making and achieving goals, build strong family relationships, and find true friends.

By listening to the *Wings of Glory* songs and reading the stories behind the songs, opportunities for discussions about the consequences of drug addiction will naturally develop. Within an atmosphere of love and understanding, you can discuss the drama of these real-life experiences with your family and friends.

The songs from *Wings of Glory* have strengthened our family tremendously. I know it can strengthen you, too. As you share its message with those around you, your home and community will be a stronger, safer, and happier place to live.

Where Does Drug Addiction Begin?

Individuals often try alcohol and drugs for one of three reasons. These are called the "Three C's of Addiction"—Curiosity, Conformity, and Confusion.

Curiosity. Some individuals are so curious about what others are saying about alcohol and drugs that they want to find out for themselves if it's true. They don't really think about the risks involved in experimentation and often act impulsively. By the time they learn they don't really want to be involved, they're trapped.

Conformity. Other individuals want to be part of a group so much that they are willing to do anything it takes to fit in—even if conformity means going against their own conscience and using alcohol and drugs. Generally, these people’s self-esteem is so low that they are always looking to others for approval and acceptance.

Confusion. There are also the high-risk individuals who are just so confused about life that they don’t know what else to do. They make a conscious decision to use alcohol or drugs in the hope that they can find some relief from their feelings of isolation, depression, or emotional pain. Of course, their pain only gets worse.

The “Three C’s of Addiction” must be avoided and replaced with the “Three I’s of Prevention”—Intelligence, Independence, and Intuition.

Intelligence. First, you must replace curiosity about drugs by using your own intelligence to gather the facts. Gaining knowledge of the long-term consequences of alcohol and drug use will educate you without having to experiment with drugs and learn the hard way.

Independence. Second, you must not give in to conformity, but prize your independence. As you begin to value yourself as an individual and always think for yourself, you will keep your values and standards high and be able to act as a leader to those around you.

Intuition. Third, you must avoid the confusion of life by listening to your intuition. As you get in tune with your feelings, you will sense spiritual promptings and feel personal guidance in your life. There is always a feeling of peace when making the right decision.

The bedrock of intelligence, independence, and intuition is concrete. These “Three I’s of Prevention” provide a firm foundation upon which all people can build their lives.

Suggestions for Parents—A Guide to Drug Prevention

If you could look into the faces of young drug addicts and listen to their stories of despair as I have, you would do everything in your power to help protect your children so that they do not ever have to go through this kind of pain. Preventing the abuse of alcohol and drugs must become a priority. The bottom line about drug abuse is that it always causes terrible agony and overwhelming sorrow to individuals and families.

Our family once attended a well-organized block party with great food and enjoyable activities for the children. It was a lot of fun until many of the adults started drinking. The happy atmosphere soon disintegrated because of the embarrassing actions of several adults who got drunk. I felt sad that the children in our neighborhood had to witness this type of immature behavior. The party would have been a complete success if it had been alcohol-free. What a great message the adults could have sent to the neighborhood children—we can all have fun without drinking! I wish I would have suggested that this be an alcohol-free party during the planning stages, but I didn’t.

Drug abuse can lead to death. People who are using drugs and alcohol can kill themselves or innocent victims. Injuring or killing people while driving under the influence are horrendous crimes. This awful insanity plunges the lives of family members and friends of the victims into a bottomless chasm of grief and sorrow. Our family was completely devastated, as many other families have been, with the horrible tragedy of having a loved one killed by a drunk driver. Through our family's ongoing grief, I lost all fear of speaking out against drugs and alcohol. Once you've had your heart totally broken and your soul completely crushed by such an excruciating experience, nothing else really matters. You have to get involved. You have to do something. When my niece and her husband and their young son were severely injured and their baby killed by a drunk driver, my sister and brother-in-law became actively involved in MADD. They have helped persuade their legislature to pass more strict drunk driving laws.

Parents can help protect their children and fight the destructive influence of drug abuse by being proactive within their families. The following ten suggestions can help you be an effective leader in your home as you teach your children to stay true to your family values.

1. Get Actively Involved in Drug Prevention. As children see their parents actively involved in the community preventing drug abuse, they may be motivated to live a drug-free life. Combining your talents with those of other concerned parents can make a real difference.

2. Openly Discuss Addiction Issues. Today's young people live in a world filled with drugs that are available to them everywhere. It is important to share your honest feelings of concern about addiction. Let your children know clearly that the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs is not acceptable in your family. As you openly discuss drug and alcohol abuse with your children, you will help them be prepared to deal with the stress of negative peer pressure that will probably occur in the future. Read books together that explain drugs' harmful effects, and take time to role play so your children can practice what they might say in different situations. Frequently express your heartfelt love to your child. Besides needing to know all the facts about drugs and alcohol and the consequences of addiction, children also need to know how much you care about them.

3. Focus on High Self-esteem. While there are no guarantees that what you do as parents will keep your children from making poor choices as they grow up, you want to do everything you can to help them succeed. It is important to find and use all the resources that are available to you through school, church, community organizations, and the Internet. As you educate yourself and effectively teach your children, you can help them avoid the pitfalls that many adolescents stumble into today. Try to help your children discover and maintain high self-esteem. When children feel good about themselves, they are less likely to get involved in drugs and other illegal activities.

4. Be Cheerful and Committed. As conscientious parents, you will continually feel the heavy weight of responsibility in teaching and guiding your children. But always remember to be of good cheer (Matthew 14:27). As you radiate real happiness and love to your children, they will be drawn to you—and listen to you—over time. If your family is not as close as you would like, you can make little changes here and there until the atmosphere in your home improves, and you have the relationship you desire. Although you will probably make many mistakes, you need to keep trying. Parenting is not a part-time job. It is a lifetime commitment.

5. Improve Communication

Children are constantly being bombarded by negative influences that try to pull them away from the values being taught in the home. It is your privilege and responsibility to open up lines of communication with your children. Be available to them when they want to talk to you, and help them feel comfortable expressing themselves. You must teach your children in a positive way so they'll not only understand the consequences of their choices, but also their intrinsic value as individuals. As communication within the family improves, your children will have a greater desire to always avoid alcohol and drugs.

6. Have Fun with Family and Friends

Take time to have fun as a family, and look for opportunities to relax, talk, and just enjoy each other's company. You will get to know your children on a different level with each activity you participate in together. Encourage your children to make good friends, and create a warm atmosphere of hospitality in your home. If your children's friends come by, invite them to stay and visit or have something to eat with your family. Let your children see your example of being friendly to other people so they will learn these emotionally healthy social skills. Good friends provide a strong network for children that help them stay away from drugs and other negative influences.

7. Make Your Home a "Safe Haven"

Make your home a safe haven where your children can feel comfortable, and secure. Don't let the hectic pressures of life spill over and cause stress in your family on a continual basis. Everyone needs some down time, so don't over-schedule every hour of the day. Put on some quiet music once in a while, and try to create a feeling of peace that everyone in the family can enjoy.

8. Be a Role Model for Addiction-free Living

Children need positive role models, exemplary teachers, and other good influential people who will help them gain a desire to stay away from drugs. They need to see people who are leading happy, productive, drug-free lives. Parents are the first role models children will follow, so be aware of the example you are setting each day. You need to be a good role model not only for your children's generation, but for your generation—and in many cases your parents' generation—as well. Our world is consumed with every kind of addiction imaginable, and this is causing acute despair and the crumbling destruction of the family. By your example, you can show others how to enjoy the freedom that an addiction-free life promises.

9. Encourage Alcohol-free Activities

When you have the opportunity to help plan any type of activity or party that children are going to attend, always speak up and suggest that it be alcohol-free. Explain that children need to socialize with adults who can show them how to have fun without drinking—then the children will have the social skills they need to have fun with their peers without drinking. Alcohol severely damages the developing brains of children, and this important period of growth must be

protected. Adults need to understand the great influence their behavior is having on the children around them and act responsibly.

10. Support Legislation against Drunk Driving

Find out what the laws for driving under the influence are in your state, and do what you can to make them tougher. Strict laws and severe penalties for every DUI will provide a wake-up call to people who need help in learning to be responsible for their self-centered, potentially destructive behavior. Many people do not take this matter seriously and even joke about getting caught, but driving under the influence is not a laughing matter. While always emphasizing the importance of never using drugs or alcohol, talk to your children about the grave dangers of driving under the influence. Help them to understand that they should never drive while under the influence of drugs and alcohol nor ride with anyone who is under the influence.

I know that by uniting your efforts with those of other families you can make a difference in preventing addiction and the tidal wave of sorrow that always follows it. While it may not be easy, it is possible to make changes that will radiate to others in your community and to the whole world. The courageous work you do will not only affect your own family in a positive way but will also bless the lives of countless generations to come.

I have developed a self-help drug prevention program called, “Bold & Fearless Prevention Program” that you might enjoy using.

HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

Five Elements of High Self-esteem

To discover happiness and high self-esteem, which I now call the “Five Elements of Joy” in the “13 Choices Happy Life Program,” you must have the desire to learn from the past, make wise choices in the present, and visualize a future filled with opportunity. The word “desire” means longing or wishing for something with great intensity. Without desire, there is no change. With desire, you can become who you want to be. Pray for the desire to improve your life as you embrace the past, present, and future.

The past is past. You cannot change the past. All you can do is accept it, learn from it, and then share your wisdom and experiences with others. As you look honestly at yourself and observe the frustrations that have been going on year after year, you can see patterns of behavior that you know in your heart you need to change.

The present is for making wise choices. The choices you make each day affect how you feel about yourself and how you interact with other people. Decisions determine your destiny. To achieve long-term happiness, you must consciously resist the impulse to seek short-term pleasure.

The future is filled with opportunities. The dream of who you want to be and what you want to accomplish are all real possibilities. As you prepare yourself in advance for the challenges and trials that will come to you throughout your life, you will be ready to deal with the future with faith, not fear.

The past, the present, and the future are all woven into the fabric of your life. As your feelings of happiness and high self-esteem begin to rise, your life will gradually become like a strong, beautiful tapestry. The Five Elements of High Self-esteem are:

1. Faith in God
2. Desire for Change
3. Accountability
4. Family Love
5. Friends with Integrity

As you embrace these five elements, you'll come to understand who you really are. High self-esteem is within you. You can discover it.

1. Faith in God

Your self-esteem needs to be built upon a strong, spiritual foundation. As you develop your relationship with God, your life will be filled with joy and peace. God loves you and knows you by name. Have faith in Him. When you want to feel God's love, read the scriptures. When you want to express love to God, kneel down and pray. When you want to receive personal revelation, write in a journal.

2. Desire for Change

One of the greatest detriments to discovering happiness and high self-esteem is feeling depressed. There are ways to eliminate depression through medical, psychological, natural, and spiritual remedies. When you have a desire to change and are willing to seek help when you need it, you will learn to feel God's "natural high" in your life every day.

3. Accountability

If you want to have high self-esteem, be accountable to yourself and to others for your actions. In simple words, do what you say you will do. If for some reason, you can't keep a commitment, let others know as soon as possible. To keep commitments to yourself, it is important to counsel with a "mentor" to set personal goals and then report back once a week. A mentor can be a trusted family member, reliable friend, or a professional counselor when necessary.

4. Family Love

The family is the most important organization on earth and it must be given the attention it deserves. There is no real quality time without an ample amount of quantity time. Love and loyalty within the family are increased through acts of kindness and consideration. As hearts are softened through forgiveness and lives are linked through love, the family can anchor each other in the turbulent seas of life.

5. Friends with Integrity

Friends who are honest with you and stand by your side during hard times are a wonderful gift. As you seek true friends, you must be a true friend in return. It's important to reach outside yourself and befriend those who look sad or lonely. When counting your friends, remember that relatives count—sometimes our best friends are found within our own family! Yes, "He is rich who hath two friends."

Using the Album *Wings of Glory* for High Self-esteem

I often listened to *Wings of Glory* to give me hope for my son, Jonathan, as I watched him continue to struggle with his addictions. Other times I found myself listening to *Wings of Glory* just for myself. As I listened, I would quietly ponder and reflect on my own personal life.

One day I decided to listen to *Wings of Glory* while I was cleaning and organizing my home. While I was doing my housework, I started asking myself some questions: “Why do I like listening to this album? Why does it make me feel so good? Why does it give me such an amazing inner strength and resolve?”

After continually listening to *Wings of Glory* for three hours that day, I realized that the messages of these songs can bring feelings of hope and healing to many types of problems in our lives. The words and music not only inspire recovery from addiction, but also provide inspiration for other trials we have to face—low self-esteem, grief, depression, loneliness, illness, family strife, fractured friendships, lack of faith, and all types of compulsive behaviors.

When I listen to this music, it helps me feel good about myself and gives me courage to do what I need to do each day. It lifts my spirits and helps me to have clarity of thought. It inspires me and brings me closer to my Savior, Jesus Christ. It makes my Heavenly Father’s love seem tangible and real. It gives me confidence that I can overcome all my compulsive behaviors. It fills my heart with serenity and peace. It encourages me to have high self-esteem.

My wish for you is not that you change who you are, but that you can discover who you are. May you be blessed with inspiration as you learn to accept and appreciate your own intrinsic uniqueness.

Building a Spiritual Foundation

The foundation of high self-esteem is spiritual. When you feel the love of God in your life and rely on the redeeming power of Jesus Christ to heal you from sin and sorrow, you find true peace. However, the healing process requires you to accept full responsibility for your actions. When you stop reliving past shame, assigning past blame, and feeling past pain, you can allow love and forgiveness to fill your heart. As you repent of your sins, seek forgiveness from those whom you have offended, and forgive those who have offended you, then you can be spiritually healed.

During my own lifelong search for high self-esteem, I came to understand a profound, eternal truth: As spirit children of God, each individual is born with high self-esteem. Because of this divine birthright, you do not need to develop high self-esteem; you simply need to discover the high self-esteem that is inherently within you.

I love the poem by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” His words capture the vision of where we came from and who we really are:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,*

*But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!*

The Old Testament clearly states: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Genesis 1:27). Knowing this divine truth, it is easy to believe that high self-esteem is a heavenly gift given to us by God. Sadly, it often remains an unopened gift.

In many cases, the environment and circumstances around us—and our own poor choices—contribute to losing the high self-esteem we were endowed with as newborn creations of God. Traumatizing experiences can shatter high self-esteem and continual negative influences can slowly erode it. We then often go searching in all the wrong places with the hope of filling that nagging, empty void that is left in us. But, we have the power within ourselves to change.

13 Choices for Happiness and High Self-esteem

The story of why I wrote the 13 Choices for Happiness and High Self-esteem is found in the booklet, “Do You Have High Self-esteem? Can You Tell Me How to Get It?” and in the “13 Choices Happy Life Program.” This self-help program is designed to help integrate these 13 CHOICES into your everyday life.

13 CHOICES FOR HAPPINESS AND HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

Feeling God’s Love—Achieving your Dreams

1.

Spiritual

I choose to worship my Father in Heaven every day and live a Christ-centered life.

2.

Physical

I choose to keep my body healthy and clean and avoid addictive substances at all times.

3.

Mental

I choose to use my mind to create, explore the universe, and find my place in it.

4.

Emotional

I choose to share my feelings kindly and honestly with others and strive to be peaceful.

5.

Social

I choose to look at all people as equals and never judge or compare others to myself.

6.

Psychological

I choose to accept full responsibility for all of my choices and never blame others.

7.

Intellectual

I choose to educate myself on a daily basis so I’ll be useful to the betterment of society.

8.

Organizational

I choose to work within the time frame I'm given without being stressed or rushed.

9.

Environmental

I choose to keep my surroundings clean and beautiful and live in a house of order.

10.

Financial

I choose to enjoy my work, live frugally, and use my means to help other people.

11.

Recreational

I choose to only see and listen to those things that uplift and inspire the human mind.

12.

Ancestral

I choose to be the transitional figure in my family to free future generations from abuse.

13.

Moral

I choose to obey all of God's commandments and love and honor each of His children.