

Dave Reilly & Blonde on Overcoming Addiction

[00:00] Rebecca: Hey, folks, I am Rebecca Blond in the belly of the beast and today I have with me, I can't even talk. It was a rough night last night for my baby and I, and I know you just had a new baby, so this interview might not go super well. I don't know. You look pretty tired, so. I am, I am. So I have Dave Cullen of Culture Wars. He's an independent journalist. He has a YouTube channel, content creator. So hello, Dave. Thank you for joining me today. Dave Reilly. Dave Cullen. What did I call you?

[00:28] Dave: We're both date. We're both Irish. I get it. I look more Italian. Did I just call you Dave Cullen?

[00:34] Dave: Yeah, it's cool though.

[00:35] Guest-1: This is going to be a disaster. It'll be fun. It'll be fun. It'll be fun. Yeah, probably, yeah. So Dave and I are buddies, IRL, like IRL.

[00:44] Rebecca: So we've talked about this a bunch in our own lives, but recently I've been, since I've started making content again, and I've talked about this a little bit on my podcast, but I've never talked about it on my channel. I have been getting just terrible imposter syndrome. I read all these comments about myself, and they're just glowing reviews of my content, and people think that I'm a really solid, put-together person. And it's making me feel terrible because almost nobody knows that I used to be an alcoholic trainwreck. And I know a lot of people, they overestimate, and they say that their alcoholism was much worse than it actually was. Mine was really bad. It was really bad. I nearly destroyed my life. And I've been sober for a few years now. And so I was thinking about doing a conversational stream about this with somebody that has a similar, yet dissimilar background. And you're such an interesting person. And I know you have a lot to say about this. So I thought we could have a little discussion about addiction and faith and the modern world. And hopefully, it won't be a disaster because I'm real tired.

[01:51] Rebecca: That's okay. So it's been up every couple of hours. My wife's doing breastfeeding thing.

[01:58] Rebecca: My daughter's been around for a month now and still haven't been to a hospital, haven't taken any injections. None of that nonsense. A whole month? It's already been a month. It's already been a month. It's flown by so quickly. She's already growing and smiling.

[02:15] Dave: It's weird because I never thought that I would have a kid.

[02:20] Dave: For multiple reasons. But one of them being where I was 10 years ago.

[02:28] Dave: That's about 10 years ago. That's when I was an active addiction. Yeah. It's been a while and a lot of things have happened, I guess, between now and then for me. But it's still something that we deal with every day. It's still something that all addicts deal with on a daily basis. Really. So my story is basically, I grew up in a pretty irreligious household, I guess. Me and my mom went to church. My dad left the church in 1973 because of some of the reforms at Vatican II. You're in the middle of Mass and they had this kiss of peace and you turned one another and talked about the eagles. And it's like, why? I mean, isn't that God up there? Isn't this a little bit more important? So he left and so I didn't really have a solid spiritual formation as a kid. And as things go in the modern world, you kind of are taught that you can create your own morality. This very Kantian, subjectivist philosophy that you make your own decisions on what is good and bad and anybody trying to put a limitation on you is the real evil person. That comes from Emile by Rousseau. So I kind of got to the point where I just thought that Christianity is a story that people tell themselves, weak people specifically tell themselves to get by as a crutch. And I figured I could do it on my own. I left home, was really into music. I went to Berkeley College of Music in Boston. And yeah, that was

[04:18] Dave: quite the change from small town Pennsylvania. And I think it was day one. You get up there and it's like my roommate, hey, you want to smoke? It's like cigarettes. It wasn't cigarettes. So anyway, being in a culture like that, you had teachers on acid.

[04:38] Dave: One of my drum teacher actually got arrested for selling marijuana to a student. I mean, it was pretty bad. You'd have Livingston Taylor. Well, I shouldn't say anybody's names. I would want to tempt fate. So anyway, the music industry is just full of a bunch of degenerates, drug addicts, all. And so being in a culture like that, it's pretty easy to start experimenting with different things as I think everybody does. Not everybody. But a lot of people do.

[05:11] Dave: And so this brings us up to, oh boy, it must have been 2009, something like that. I had a chronic pain condition. And so I don't know. I had epididymitis.

[05:25] Dave: I don't know how many people I'm telling this to on the Internet now, but basically it's like a swollen testicle. It's very painful. It's like getting kicked in the nuts all the time. You can't walk. You can't get out of bed. It was painful. And the doctors didn't know what was wrong. We think it was just like a genetic thing that happened. At that time, my uncle had a similar thing happen to him. So after a month of going in and out, getting tests and testing negative for everything and not really figuring out what to do next, the doctors decided to shut me up by prescribing opiates, started with five milligrams of Vicodin. And then it was seven and a half milligram pills. And then it was like the step up went from five milligrams to seven milligrams within two weeks. And then by the end of the next two week segment, they upped it to four 30 milligram oxycontins a day. Wow. Yeah. So that was about 120 milligrams a day. That's that's a lot. One second. So a lot of you'll hear like psychedelic people talk a lot about set and setting a lot, right? And Berkeley College of Music was not a very good

[06:46] Dave: setting to be in and to be prescribed opiates like this. My roommate, best friend at the time, I think he's doing well now. He was a struggling heroin addict. And so he would do heroin and I would have my pills. And it very quickly got out of hand. I mean, it got to the point where

[07:11] Dave: I had been on this stuff for about nine months straight. I mean, you're not supposed to do that. I mean, this stuff, these pills were supposed to be prescribed for people with like a surgery, you know, like back surgery or some sort of procedure like that. And you're off pretty quickly, you know, it's not supposed to be a full time forever thing. It's not a fix.

[07:38] Dave: And so by about eight months in, I was working at a recording studio in downtown Boston. And

[07:47] Dave: being on that much medication, I was falling asleep at work, you know, they called the nod, you'd hit the nod and you'd start falling asleep and you'd wake up and you'd try to keep working. One of my clients at the recording studio was pretty upset with the fact that he had spent a lot of money to have an engineer that was falling asleep on the job. So he gave me something to keep me up. And all of a sudden now I've got not one habit but two.

[08:16] Dave: And as this progressed, you have to go back into the doctor's office to, you know, take tests and make sure that you're taking what they're prescribing you, etc.

[08:28] Dave: And on one of those tests that came back positive that I had taken cocaine. So they just cut me off cold turkey. And within about eight hours, I called my buddy John and was like, Hey, we're going to New Jersey, we're going to get some heroin. And we went and it was like not even a second thought. I mean, when you look at the pharmacology of these things,

[08:52] Dave: they're almost identical. I mean, opiates, opioids, I guess you could say the oxy

[08:58] Dave: condoms and the Percocets and that kind of stuff. Those are synthetic forms of heroin, basically.

[09:05] Dave: And so it was off to the races. And that's basically how I lived my life for about two years.

[09:13] Dave: It was awful. It quickly became that I used to be passionate about music and concerts and playing live and things like that. And just in a flash, it became my whole waking life was about acquiring and using as much drugs as I possibly could. Everything in my life was oriented around it. I went homeless for a couple of weeks. I started living in the recording studio that I was working at. It was a pretty difficult time. And I don't even know where I got the idea that running away from Boston would fix the problem. But that's where the idea came from. And I left, I went back to Pennsylvania thinking that I could outrun myself. I moved a lot back in the day.

[10:13] Dave: Unfortunately, you take yourself with you everywhere you go. And within two weeks of moving to rural Pennsylvania, I found myself with a guy who had thrown 10 bags on my kitchen table.

[10:26] Dave: And it was like, how was this happening? How was this happening? Like,

[10:30] Dave: I didn't know anybody. I didn't have any connections. Yeah, it's crazy. People think that drug addicts are these dumb low lives. But when you look at the data on people with

[10:39] Rebecca: addiction, especially alcoholism and opiate addiction, they have consistently higher than average IQs. And they can get stuff done. Like, if you are looking for drugs, it doesn't matter where you are. If you're in the middle of the Sahara Desert, you're fucking finding drugs. Absolutely. Absolutely. And you know, it is funny that you say that. It's true. I think that

[10:58] Dave: most of the addicts, when I was like, you know, in early recovery, you know, you would go through AANA and all that kind of stuff. Yeah. They're some of the smartest, most creative people that you meet. They really are. High anxiety, too. I think that there's a correlation there.

[11:15] Dave: So, I mean, we'll get back to my story in a minute, maybe, but I think that
[11:22] Dave: this entire culture that we're living in, right, this like American experiment, this
neoliberal capitalist, whatever system that we're currently living in,
[11:32] Dave: is a culture of death, right? It's not a culture of life. It's not one that cherishes, having
kids or, you know, doing productive things. It's a culture that forces people down roads that
[11:47] Dave: people shouldn't really be going down, you know. People constantly getting laid off of
their works, replaced now by robots, you know. Used to be immigrants, now it's robots.
[11:59] Dave: People living lives that seem purposeless. Yeah. Because they know that what they
can do, they can just be replaced by a machine. And that will make you depressed. That will make
you very depressed. Or you can look at all of the lies that are being told about history, about politics,
about the economy. And you can clearly see things happen. You could see something happen with
your own two eyes and turn on the news and they will tell you the exact opposite of what you know
that you saw. It's gaslighting at the highest level. And
[12:32] Rebecca: for people that are anxious and sensitive but don't have a lot of self-awareness,
getting these mixed messages from media and the government and teachers and family, it's really
disorienting. And so I think a lot of us that abuse substances did it to kind of
[12:50] Rebecca: to self-correct this discombobulation and to make sense of the world around us, or
at a minimum to numb us from all the disorientation that was happening. Right. Right. I completely
agree. I think it's a matter of like,
[13:06] Dave: you maybe, I don't know, for me maybe it was a kind of, you're walking around and
[13:13] Dave: you're at Berkeley and you're going to do music and then you find out that like an
earworm, those things that get stuck in your head, like Millennial Whoop, or these different kinds of
songs, they have it down to a formula. It's formulaic. It's not even like creativity at this point. It's just
how can we market and how can we make as much money as possible? And that'll crush your
dreams. And so when you start to wake up to these realities, all of a sudden it's like realizing that
there's this air conditioner that's been running the whole time. And you start to realize, hey, wait a
second. When I do drugs, it's like it gets really quiet. It doesn't bother me as much. Exactly. Exactly.
For me specifically, I guess, I don't want to speak for other people. I was prescribed these drugs for
pain, for physical pain, for actual legitimate physical pain that I was in at the time. But at some point,
I realized that it wasn't just taking away physical pain, it was also taking away emotional pain. And
that was the sticking point. That was why when they cut off the supply, I went to harder drugs.
That's why I went to find illicit stuff on the streets because it was the emotional pain that drove me.
It was the feeling of peace that I didn't have to worry about the craziness that I was seeing all
around the world around me, I guess. That was what really was a driving and motivating factor, I
think. And that's so appealing just to get a moment where you don't have to deal with any of this.
[14:45] Rebecca: I see how people become drug addicts, especially in this climate.
[14:51] Rebecca: So let's talk a little bit about how you quit. Right. So that was definitely not quite...
Did you hit a rock bottom? They always talk about rock bottom in AA. And like, you have to hit rock
bottom. I'm like, why? Do you really have to hit rock bottom?
[15:06] Rebecca: Well, I don't know. I hope it was rock bottom because if it wasn't, you know,
[15:11] Dave: what's next? But I think it was rock bottom. It was about a month after I had moved to
Pennsylvania again after Boston, after Berkeley. And this kid had come over and he gave me some
[15:26] Dave: dope. And within a month, my habit was two times what it was in Boston. Oh, geez.
You know, they say that when you quit and then you go back, the habit never went away and it just
keeps growing. And so that was definitely true for me. So within a month, having relocated my
entire life, if I couldn't kick it just by moving and if I couldn't kick it by just trying to be more active or
doing other things, maybe you'll never quit. And maybe this is how it's going to be forever. Maybe I
can't run away from this. That was the thought process that led me to buying about \$150 worth of
dope, putting it in a needle and trying to kill myself. So I went to the hospital for about nine days. My
best friend, you know, called the cops. He was like, look, I think he's about to do something really
stupid. And had you used intravenously before? Yeah. Okay. A lot. I mean, that's that was the after
I after I got off of the
[16:35] Dave: prescription stuff, it went straight to intravenous. Not not really. It was like I had a
stuffy nose and that was a good enough excuse. I don't mean to laugh, but it's just addict
[16:46] Rebecca: thinking. It's like any excuse will do. It's like, I didn't drink for a month, but I'm
thirsty. So

[16:52] Rebecca: the sky is blue. I'm going to drink all cloudy. I'm going to drink or whatever. Yeah. I mean, it's it's that kind of mentality. You look for any kind of little thing that you can. And

[17:02] Dave: that becomes your your excuse for the day. So I was in the hospital for nine days. I got put into a rehab program, which I did do successfully a 30 day rehab program that was very difficult. It was very difficult. Because on top of the prescription opiates that I was given and then subsequently taken off of, they had also they had me on a colonopin. Oh, geez. An anti anxiety. Now that combination will kill you. That combination would kill you.

[17:35] Dave: And they had me on that concurrently. Actually, I think some people have sued successfully families of, you know, people who have died because they took both of them at the same time and the hearts just stopped. So I'm very lucky. I'm very lucky that I didn't die when I tried to. And I'm lucky that I didn't die just by taking what the doctors gave me or by, you know, combining. Anyway, the withdrawal from heroin sucked. That was pretty bad. Oh yeah, definitely. But nothing like the withdrawal from the benzodiazepines. That was like ripping your face off. Like you didn't even feel comfortable in your own skin. It was pretty bad.

[18:18] Dave: So that took pretty much the entirety of that 30 days of that that rehab program just getting to a sense of normal. And so I got out. I was in a halfway house for about two days and I used

[18:33] Dave: pretty much like Glock work. So then I bounced around Baltimore for a bit and then Brooklyn a bit. Let me ask you a question. Let's go back a little bit. When you went to the halfway house,

[18:42] Rebecca: did you think in earnest before you got there that you were not ever going to use again, that you were not going to relapse? Or did you know? Yeah, I think I knew. I knew. I wasn't really, you know, it was like, well, I'm happy I'm not depressed anymore. You know,

[19:00] Dave: or I'm happy I'm slightly less depressed than I was when I got into this mess.

[19:06] Dave: But no, I really couldn't imagine life without drugs. I could not imagine living my life not like that. It had been pretty much my entire world for about three years,

[19:16] Dave: two, three years. And so yeah, and then especially in the music scene. So it's like, well, okay, well, maybe I won't do drugs, but I'm still going to play in a band or I'm going to record bands and, you know, you just you can't get away from it in that in that kind of an environment.

[19:32] Dave: So I went back to Bloomsburg after a few months. And at this point, I think my dad found out, you know, that I was back in town and he sent out an email to my family saying, look, my son's an addict. He's going to lie to you. He's going to try and take your money.

[19:47] Dave: You know, don't trust him. And that hurt. Wow, that must have been hard for him too.

[19:54] Dave: Yeah. Yeah, I try not to think about what my parents have gone through. God bless them. They

[20:02] Dave: they did right by me, you know, and and here's how they did right by me. Basically, he sent that email out and I got angry about it. And I ran to downtown where my dad worked.

[20:13] Dave: And he was standing outside for some reason. I don't know why the timing on it was something

[20:18] Dave: something providential, I guess. And so I was running towards him. I wanted to go and yell at him, right? I wanted to go and bitch him, bitch him out for being, you know, putting me on blast to the family. And he just stood there and I was running. And so I decided to put my shoulder down and I tackled him. And then I ran away. And so I ran. And as I ran, they called the police on me. And as it was my dad was friends with the judge and the police chief.

[20:52] Dave: And the DA. And so they got me arrested. And they put me in jail. Because they knew that that was basically the only way that they were going to keep me off of drugs. And so I spent some time there, got sent out to a rehab again, 15 day, and then sent back to jail.

[21:11] Dave: I hadn't seen my lawyer, by the way. So it was just a, it was a misdemeanor disturbance of the peace, whatever. And then I got put on a waiting list to get into the Salvation Army program. And that was a six or a nine month program. I can't quite remember. And so that's what I did. I eventually got transferred up to Wilkesbury, Pennsylvania, where I was in the Salvation Army for about six or nine months. Again, I can't really remember. I think it was a six month program. But I stayed a little longer. Anyway, that was at that period of time, the longest that I had been clean consecutively. Oh, did I lose them?

[21:57] Dave: Live chat, let me know if I am still alive. And we just lost Dave, or if my feet is also not

[22:03] Rebecca: coming in either. Hello. Oh, good. Okay. Are we there? We're fine. Yeah. Okay.

So Salvation Army every day we would wake up, we get put on a bus and we would go to this like

[22:18] Dave: garment sorting center, like the donation center where people would bring their used clothes and then people would be there and they sort through that stuff. They put it on hangers and racks and they send it out to the stores for sale. So that's where I was. That's where I worked for about six months straight. And every day we would go out and we'd smoke cigarettes by the dumpster out back and on a nail hanging next to the dumpster was a rosary.

[22:44] Dave: And it bothered me. It just absolutely bothered me. I don't know why it was like screaming at me.

[22:53] Dave: Oh, did we lose them again? Oh, well, ask me questions in the live chat so that in the interim,

[23:02] Rebecca: I have something to say because sitting here awkwardly by myself is good for nobody.

[23:07] Rebecca: Oh, okay. Is this near? Oh, yeah. I don't know. It might be. I mean, it might be me. I've got Starlink. So I think that they started selling Starlink and maybe there's more load on the system. I'm not really sure. It's okay. Live chat drops some questions in there in case it happens again so that I'm not sitting here. Yeah. So anyway, we get I found this rosary and it

[23:31] Dave: bothered me. And if you were caught taking anything from the donation sorting center, like you would be ejected. And as a part of my probation, if I got ejected, I'd have to go back to jail. So that just shows you the gravity of for four months, I looked at this thing every day and eventually one day I took it. I was like, I can't just look at that at work. I want to have that with me everywhere. I don't know why I'm not Catholic. I was never raised Catholic. I never went to Catholic school. I don't even know about the rosary, but I just wanted it. I don't know why I can't explain it. Maybe it was an intrigue or maybe it was something to conquer, I guess. Yeah, it was a weird way of doing it. So at this point, you know, I started doing some research on my own, you know, the Salvation Army people, they wanted you to go to their little church services or whatever. And you did and it was very performative or whatever, like deliverance prayers and, you know, stuff like that, which maybe I guess that works for some people. But for me, it wasn't anywhere near enough. AA wasn't enough, NA wasn't enough. And so I'm looking at this rosary and I'm thinking about my family. I'm thinking about my grandmother who prayed the rosary every day until she died. And my great, great grandmother and all the way back, we were Catholic. And all of a sudden I'm one of the first generations to be born, kind of not really going to Catholic church every Sunday. So it intrigued me. And I started doing some research in it. And it was at this point that I started to become aware. I mean, I had started to think more clearly at this point, you know, the fog was kind of beginning to lift, you're still seeing these issues in the world and the things that will kind of annoy you or drive you to use the drugs, that's all still there.

[25:15] Dave: But so I started researching and googling and I was definitely a little bit of a Marxist back then. That's definitely a commie. And so I was into like this whole like self identifying thing, like if you said you were a 400 pound black woman, I'd have to believe you because that's how you self identified. Because, you know, we all, because we all, we all make up our own reality and we all make up our own morality. That's what I believed at the time, right. And so that coupled with this curiosity of Catholicism drove me to research it a little bit, you know,

[25:52] Dave: there were just some questions that I had had about, you know, what is it? Why is it? Why do people still go? I mean, what's up with this Christianity thing? But also just this like, I mean, I think it was an actual grace, you know, from my parents who were praying for me. My dad had reverted during my addiction. He was looking for answers. He was trying to figure out what had happened. How did I mess up? Why is my son an addict trying to come to the understanding of that? And he found his way back to the Catholic Church and brought my mom with him.

[26:25] Dave: And of course, I didn't know that at this point. You know, I was just kind of on my own. We were not on speaking terms. So I'm googling and I'm presented with this kind of

[26:38] Dave: decision to make here. Do I pray if I were ever going to pray, which I probably won't. But if I were ever going to pray the rosary, would I pray 15 mysteries or 20, right? There was a change. John Paul II had added five mysteries to the rosary in like the 80s just because they can't leave anything untouched. This is like modern innovation. And I decided, you know, if I ever was going to pray, I would probably just pray three, you know, that's what my grandmother would have done and my great grandmother. So, you know, we'll go with that. Meanwhile, you know, things were just kind of pittering along. I wasn't in a particularly good situation.

[27:16] Dave: You know, I hadn't dealt with any of the problems. I mean, I had gotten sober for about nine months, but I hadn't dealt with any of the problems. And so one night my situation was

bad and it was so bad that I actually thought, you know what, this is it God. I'm going to give this a go. I'm going to try praying this rosary because I've tried the deliverance prayers. I've tried the Protestant churches of pride. I've tried AA and NA. And this is your last shot. Basically, it was an ultimatum and I probably shouldn't have done that, but I did. And so I'm confronted with these three sets of mysteries. I don't know if you know anything about the rosary, but you have the joyful mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries and the glorious mysteries. And as a depressed, you know, recovering heroin addict, I didn't understand anything about joy. There was no joy left in the world and glory. Get out of here. Are you kidding me? But I did understand sorrow and suffering and the sorrowful mysteries basically follow Christ as he goes up to the cross, being scourged and mocked and the crown of thorns

[28:26] Dave: and ultimately the crucifixion. And I understood suffering and pain. And so I was able to muster the strength, I guess you could say, to pray the five mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries.

[28:39] Dave: And this doesn't really happen for everybody. And you shouldn't expect it to happen. But the next day, everything changed. I wound up getting a new apartment.

[28:51] Dave: I got a motorcycle so I could actually get a job. I could, you know, bike to places.

[28:56] Dave: The probation was coming to an end. And I was starting to see like an end in sight. And my perspective had changed. And so I decided to pray the sorrowful mysteries again.

[29:09] Dave: And I continued to do that because there was something deeply profound about meditating on the sufferings of somebody else and not just wallowing in my own self pity, my own sufferings and my own kind of guilty conscience,

[29:23] Dave: thinking back on all the bad things that I've done to people. So I wanted to know more about Catholicism. And I decided to do some reading, you know, and everything that you read is like pedophile priests, this and, you know, Christopher Columbus was a white supremacist, a king to America to enslave the natives. Okay, guy, I figured I owed it if I would let my, you know, a white male barista self-identify as a 400 pound black woman, then shouldn't I allow the Catholic Church to self-identify? Shouldn't I let it tell me what it is, right? And so I, this is back in the age of free internet, right? We don't have that anymore. And I don't know if anybody would be able to go down this path now. But back then in 2012, 2011, 2012, you could actually research things on the internet and get like a fairly honest thing coming out the other side of the algorithm. Yeah. So I found out about these things called ecumenical councils, and they are basically where the church defines what it believes and what it teaches, and I read all of them. And I got to the point where you get to the 1965 Vatican II and I'm like,

[30:34] Dave: nope, that was written by either a Protestant or a commie or both. Like, that's not it.

[30:41] Dave: And so I decided to at least give it a shot to try and go to a Catholic Church. I went to St. Joseph's on the hill in Wilkesbury, Pennsylvania. And I kid you not, I walk in the front door on Sunday, I open the door to the sanctuary and I look in and I'm like, what? And I went back outside and checked the sign to see if it was really a Catholic Church. And it said Catholic and I'm like, they must be letting Protestants use it because that's not Catholic. That's not what I think of when I think of Catholicism. That's not what I read about in these ecumenical councils.

[31:20] Dave: And so I might be getting a little into the weeds on the Catholic thing at this point, but the point of the matter is that I have been going to AA and going to NA when you're in rehab, they usually like prescribe that you do that or even probation parole, that kind of thing.

[31:36] Dave: But the point is that AA and NA didn't really help me much. I mean, as a matter of fact, most of the times that you wind up going to the rooms like that, you'll find people that are looking for people to sell drugs to because they want to make money. Yeah, or they'll try to. This probably wasn't a problem for you, but 13th step, yeah.

[31:59] Dave: Yeah, exactly. And that's where you go and pick up some person that's struggling with addiction and the rest is history, I guess. But yeah, and I don't want to disparage AA and NA

[32:11] Rebecca: because in terms of recidivism rates, it does provide people. It's awful. No, it's really bad.

[32:18] Rebecca: 1% of people that go through treatment programs do. What I will say that's positive about AA because it has provided me with something. It's this feeling that I am the only person that's been a piece of shit on the planet and that I'm the worst piece of shit. When I go to AA, I realize that

[32:36] Rebecca: alcoholics are basically the same and all of us have done the same things to our friends, to our families and everything like that. And that makes me feel better.

[32:47] Rebecca: There is an element of knowing that you're not alone. That's really, really important.

[32:52] Dave: Really important with this thing. And that was kind of what I was even getting out of the rosary, looking at someone else's sufferings. It wasn't in the rooms that I found what I needed, I guess. But I definitely remember one day specifically, as I was researching this Catholic thing, I remember sitting in a circle and you know how they'd pray the Lord's prayer at the end of all the meetings. And I remember standing next to a Muslim on my right side and a Jew on the left and all praying the Our Father together. And I'm like, this is not... Somewhat preposterous. Yeah, I was like, how does this work? How does this work? And so this was kind of the beginning of

[33:34] Dave: coming to a better philosophical understanding of reality that we've got these three mutually exclusive religions here and we're somehow all praying the same prayer together.

Something's got to give. This was the kind of thing that would drive me to use, like looking at these kinds of inconsistencies. And I didn't really understand it or what I was looking at. So, AA and NA were founded by what Dr. Bob and Bill will

[34:05] Dave: remason. Not that that, you know, not all Freemasons are bad. I get it. And they're not the real enemy. They are kind of an outgrowth of the enemy, Judaism for Gentiles in a way. But the point of AA that I came to after a couple of months of pretty heavy research was that it seems like AA and NA were the Catholic program, right? Like the Catholic prescription for how to live your life divorced from Jesus and divorced from the church, right? Like this idea of accepting that you've done bad things and that there's a higher power and then making a list of all the bad things you had done and the people you had wronged and then telling somebody,

[34:48] Dave: telling somebody. That was the big one. So that's basically describing confession.

[34:53] Dave: It's basically describing confession and then you do your penance and then you go and you tell other people that they can do their penance too, basically is what AA is. And so I figured, well, when I was doing drugs, you know, I would get the best shit I could get, you know, the best that money could buy. And if I'm going to do recovery for real, if I'm going to try and live life that isn't beholden to drug dealers, I've only got one option. That's to go for the straight dope. And if these guys copy the Catholic Church, right, if they copy the Catholic Church's program, then I'm just going to go with the Catholic Church. Shoot that SSPX right into my veins. And there is like a really interesting history with it. I think Cardinal Spellman was actually presented with the Alcoholics Anonymous book and refused to censor it, which is strange because there is plenty in that book that at the time should have been put on the index, this kind of religious syncretism, ecumenism in a way, getting, you know, different religions together to pray.

[36:01] Dave: That's kind of a no-no for Catholics. So it's interesting that Spellman chose not to censor that book, especially when, you know, the Catholic Church could have done something. You know, they could have created their own groups or support groups, really. But they saw the utility in it clearly. And then they probably saw that it would bring people to Catholicism. Well, I don't know. I don't know. I didn't follow that rabbit hole to the end. I remember calling the archives for the Archdiocese of New York. Well, you tried. I wanted to get my hands on it and they would not let me into the archive. So I never got to the bottom of that. So at this point, I'm going to Mass. My dad had brought me. We found out,

[36:47] Dave: you know, we got together at like Cracker Barrel and talked and he was wondering how is it that you are getting along? And I pulled a rosary out of my pocket. And he looks at me and he pulled a rosary out of his pocket. This was strange because my dad had never been a religious guy. I'd never seen him pray before or go to church before. So the idea that he was looking at this Catholic thing, too, was interesting. And so it was his birthday coming up and I didn't have any money. And I said, what do you want? What do you want for your birthday? And he said, I want you to come to Mass with me. And I was thinking to myself about the church St. Joseph's where I walked in and it was like a bunch of Protestants, right? And I was like, okay, my dad's off the goop, you know, but I'll go with him, I guess, to his church. And it did turn out to be an SSPX church, a traditional Latin Mass church. And all of a sudden, all of these things that I'd read about in these ecumenical councils, while I was trying to get to the bottom of it, it all started to come alive. And I started to see and understand things that you can't get from just reading it on the page. So at this point, I had pretty much gotten to the point where I couldn't prove Catholicism wrong. I could not really find any logical inconsistencies within it within the system itself. And I decided I want to be Catholic. So I approached the priest and started talking to him and he handed me this stack of paper about that thick, with all the different sins you could commit, right? Because you have to

make a confession. And I had been baptized when I was eight. And so I had to confess all of the sins that I committed all the way back to that point. I was 22, 23 at this point. How do you even do that? I mean, you can't. It's an impossible task. I did. I did. I did get through it eventually, but it took about a year. It took about a year of sitting down with these papers and reading through them and making lists and looking at this massive, massive list and relapsing. Are you relapsed? Oh, man. Oh, yeah. Two or three times. It was pretty bad. I mean, what are you going to do? I mean, you're confronting evil itself when you're confronting sin. And when you understand the gravity of that, [39:10] Dave: it can be difficult, a difficult thing to get through without help living on your own in an apartment in the city, you know? So eventually, after about a year of trying and failing, I'd moved back to Bloomsburg a little bit closer to my parents. They would pick me up every Sunday and take me to Mass. I had heard about this thing called a retreat, right? A spiritual retreat. Basically, where you go for a week to it's like a monastery.

[39:40] Dave: It's quiet. No eye contact with people, no speaking at all. Only the priests were allowed to speak. And then when you were in spiritual direction with them, you could talk.

[39:52] Dave: So quiet. It was a very quiet place. You got to turn in your cell phone, you know? No distractions. And the first three days out of this five day retreat were basically just making the preparation to make a general confession, understanding the gravity of sin, understanding

[40:10] Dave: why Christ died on the cross, understanding penance, and conjuring up sorrow for the things that you had done, right? So on Wednesday, I made my first confession, a general confession. It was about 45 minutes long. And I cried. And then about 30 minutes later, I went to my first high mass and received communion for the first time. And I cried again. And so that was the real turning point for me. That was really the high turning point.

[40:44] Dave: Did you feel forgiven? This is where I'm really hung up.

[40:48] Rebecca: See, that was the hardest part. That was the hardest part. That was the reason why it's not feeling the forgiveness. It was understanding that I am forgivable.

[41:00] Rebecca: How does one do that? Because I also know that it's a grave sin. You know, I've confessed everything, the best of my ability. And I still live with so much guilt and shame on a daily basis. And it's because, I think fundamentally, I believe that I'm not forgiven. And I know that's a grave sin to think that I'm beyond forgiveness from God. I haven't done anything that bad. I mean, good Lord. But I still feel that way. And I can't seem to stop or overcome this. And I'm really stuck in this mentality that I have to live with shame because God's never going to forgive me. And I don't know why.

[41:37] Rebecca: Yeah. So for me, it was a little bit different. But maybe it'll help someone or you, I don't know.

[41:44] Dave: So the idea that when I was really in the throes of my addiction, my dad made these phone calls to the police, to the DA, to the judge. I'm the one that supplied the circumstance by tackling my dad. But he kind of capitalized on that, I guess you could say. For good, he helped me.

[42:05] Dave: I wouldn't be here today without that, most likely. And so coming to the understanding that that was good, that I needed that, that he did that out of love for me. Out of love, right. And not to resent him for that. That was very difficult to get past, to get past the resentment of my dad. How come dad, who was raised Catholic, why didn't you raise me Catholic?

[42:42] Dave: To come over the resentment of the rest of the family that had left the faith.

[42:47] Dave: You were given this program of life on a silver platter and you trashed it. You left. You left the church. Why? Why did you do that? Why did you trash that gift? And there was a resentment to that, right? And your father is this kind of earthly

[43:08] Dave: manifestation of God, right? So if you can't forgive your father, your real father,

[43:13] Dave: how could you be forgiven by your Heavenly Father if you're at odds with one another? And so for me, it was coming to grips to understanding that love isn't about making someone feel good necessarily. It's not about condoning their bad behaviors. It's about

[43:35] Dave: doing something substantial that's good and it's sometimes uncomfortable and sometimes

[43:40] Dave: very difficult. But that's what love is. It's not this Hollywood bullshit. It's real. And so when I was able to come to grips with that and I was able to forgive my father

[43:59] Dave: for the perceived slights, that's where I was able to find the ability to forgive myself.

[44:10] Dave: And that was the biggest hurdle to be able to confront my sins and to believe that I even could be forgiven, not even that you feel forgiven or forgiven, whatever, not even that you feel that, but just that it's possible that I could be forgiven. Getting to that place was tough, but once I got

there, that's what really helped me move on with my life and become successful. Well, [44:46] Dave: successful. I mean, what? I'm not like Elon Musk. I'm not like rolling in money, but I have a baby. I have a wife that loves me. Yeah, and a wonderful wife and a beautiful home. I mean, you've done wonderful things

[44:57] Rebecca: with your life. That's success. That's real success. And so the way that I've been able to continue down that path

[45:06] Dave: of success has been to be Catholic, to continually go to confession, to pray, to go to mass,

[45:17] Dave: to try and recall those resolutions that I had made on that retreat all those years ago.

[45:26] Dave: You know, that's the program that if I deviate from, I will run into problems. It's happened. You know, it's like you get close to the edge, depending on the

[45:39] Dave: circumstances of who you're with, you know, it's like a nice edge, you know. Exactly. That's exactly true. And you always think, you know, I'm not having cravings,

[45:48] Rebecca: everything's going so well, I have so much to live for. And then you start to get into this comfort of like, well, maybe I could just have one drink. And this actually happened to me, I got sober 10 years ago. And then, and then I smoked tons and tons of weed. I wasn't drinking, so I felt fine about it, you know. And then, like, I don't know, between five and three years ago, there were a handful of times where I would just drink what in a way that I thought was normally, I'm like, I'm not getting totally wasted. So does it really matter. And then the last time I drank, which was about two years ago, I just had a few glasses of wine and it was fine and I felt awesome and nothing happened. And in many ways, that was the absolute worst outcome. It would have been better if I puked all over myself and slapped my husband in the face in many ways because there was not a catastrophic outcome to my drinking. And it's so it made me believe like, wow, maybe I could do this normally. Maybe this time it'll be a little different. Maybe this time it'll be different. But I know it will never be different. And if I continue down that road, you know, I'm just going to end up exactly where I was before, I'll be in a worse place because I have a husband and child now.

[46:57] Rebecca: And to that point, to that point, one of the people that was very, very influential for me,

[47:02] Dave: the guy that helped me get into the Salvation Army for that, that third and final rehab. Um, really good guy, really good guy. We talk about Tolkien all the time. We would,

[47:15] Dave: when I became Catholic, we would debate theology all the time. You know, he was a heroin addict too. And then he became an officer in the Salvation Army. He started to run a church. He became a pastor. He got married. He had three kids. Oh, no. Yeah. And so the point is that, like, to understand why do people use drugs? Why do people drink? It's not that you have a drug problem or an alcohol problem. We have a spiritual problem in not just this country, but the world at this point really has fallen, fallen under a shadow in a way. It's funny, you know, you look at it. Is it Lenin or Trotsky that said that religion is the opiate of the masses? Well, guess what? We don't have religion anymore. And is it any wonder that people are turning to opiates?

[48:14] Dave: You know, so understanding that it's a spiritual problem that we all have that drives us to

[48:22] Dave: to do something, to use something that numbs the understanding that we all have deep down, that we do have a problem. We do have a spiritual unease about us. And that disease

[48:38] Dave: is what we cure by using a drug or drinking, right? It solves that problem at first until it starts to become the problem, you know? So I think a lot of people don't understand that, like, you know, you could talk to somebody and they would be like, oh, well, you know, you're such a fuck up. Why did you use drugs? Why did you drink or something like that?

[49:04] Dave: But they don't understand what's really going on here, right? And there is definitely

[49:11] Dave: a personal responsibility that everybody that uses drugs or drinks, they do have that personal responsibility for their actions. But this culture that we live in, this hypocrisy in our society, and the lies that we are swimming in and bombarded with every day,

[49:29] Dave: how could you not want to quiet that down? I mean, I don't understand how you could not want to escape sometimes from that, right? And so it's a matter of some people escape with gambling or with pornography. It doesn't have to be drugs. It could be

[49:48] Dave: Wall Street bets. It could be, you know, stock market. It could be crypto. It could be exercise Twitter. Yeah. I mean, whatever. I mean, there's all kinds of different escapes that will take you out of where you're at and take your mind off of whatever it is

[50:04] Dave: that is bothering you. So, you know, I think that's having that critical understanding of that, I think is important because you can stop drinking. And I know plenty of like dry alcoholics. Yeah, you know, they just stopped drinking, but they never worked on that spiritual problem that they had, or they they never really progressed past just putting down the drink. You know? Yeah. So, that's something else to think about, too.

[50:39] Dave: I think that's definitely true. I mean, and I think that that is the problem that I'm having [50:43] Rebecca: right now. I mean, one, I'm dealing with all this guilt and shame from things that I've done 10, 15 years ago. And then there's this image dichotomy that I have where people had pretty much no idea that I ever even used to be like this. But if you told somebody from 10 years ago that I was giving people advice on the internet, they would be like, don't listen to this crazy bitch. You know, and so I have this mental image of who I am and who I'm presenting myself as. And I just figured that that it would be cathartic if I just came out and I just talked to people about how I am an alcoholic. I'm in recovery and it's difficult for me sometimes as it is. I mean, I'm sure you have cravings and

[51:24] Rebecca: I thought maybe it would give me some accountability, too.

[51:27] Rebecca: Yeah, I mean, the craving, it was funny. I was talking with my dad actually before we did this

[51:32] Dave: podcast, just to see if he had some other insights that I should share. And it was funny, you know, I talked with him about this. It was even in the first couple of times that I started to go into mass, right? With with my parents, it's like you're sitting there in the pews and it's like, if you've ever seen a Latin mass, it's one of the most beautiful things you can see. Yeah, it is. And all of a sudden, you're like thinking about spoons and needles. And it's like, how is this possible? You know, and so on the one hand, you have this like very real like temptation that's happening that you cannot shake. And on the other hand, you're like, why am I thinking about that? Yeah, it's so it's interesting. But it does get better over time. It does get better over time. And depending on, again, like the things that you fill your life with and the pursuits that you have, the the things that you use to fill that space, I guess you could say, you know, that's what will eventually you'll find yourself daydreaming at mass about ham radios, maybe as opposed to drugs or something like that.

[52:49] Dave: Yeah, there's there's a lot of other stuff that I'm thinking of, but I'm not quite sure. No, no, it's okay. We should wind down. But I did have one question. Do you I know a lot of people,

[52:58] Rebecca: especially right now, are dealing with alcoholism, dealing with addiction, drug deaths are up, I think 18 to 25%. Since coronavirus started, it's a very difficult time to be battling these demons. Do you have any advice outside of coming to Catholicism and finding Jesus Christ? You have any advice for people, especially in early sobriety? Yeah, well, I mean, just before we even get to that, I was going to say, I mean, you've got to see this. This is 10 Western states in America

[53:25] Dave: see drug overdose deaths increased by nearly 100%. Hamilton, Ontario's opioid deaths during pandemic among Western Ontario, to the point that they stopped counting the number of deaths due to overdose. They can't do that. Good grief. They stop counting. So the thing is, it's funny, because it's like, I remember I actually won an award for some work that I had done. I don't know if you can, if it'll focus, there we go. This is an award that I got from the Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters for a broadcast series I had done about the opiate epidemic and exposing that in a week long series. And we were talking about these kinds of issues in 2016-2017 on the radio, but nobody's talking about this anymore. And I'm suspicious because of that. I'm wondering what's going on. Is it actually up because of the pandemic and people are stuck at home and they're bored and they're depressed, they lost their jobs and so they're using? Or is it down because people aren't going out anymore and they aren't able to get it? There's just nothing out there. I've tried Googling, I've tried using Bing and Duck Duck Go. No one's talking about this stuff. And that makes me suspicious that this problem is way worse than everybody is understanding. You look at Weimar Germany and you look at the conditions that they had there, the rampant unemployment, the homelessness, the drug abuse, the overdose deaths, the suicides, it's coming to America. It's here now. And so just to understand the gravity of this thing so that if you, not you, but one of the people watching this,

[55:06] Dave: are struggling, like you're not alone. There are other people out there that are struggling. There are a lot of people out there that will unfortunately go the route of like,

[55:19] Dave: it's Antoine Dodson, right? Do you know who he was?

[55:25] Dave: He was a young guy that was at Charlottesville that got doxed.

[55:29] Dave: And he committed suicide, didn't he? It was a heroin overdose. Oh gosh, that's right. Yeah. So I mean, these leftists will find, you know, and they will push your buttons

[55:40] Dave: and try to, you know, I mean, they would be happy to watch, you know, all the people. So I mean, like just being right wing doesn't solve the problem being Catholic even. I mean, I know priests that have struggled with addictions, right? That doesn't necessarily solve the problem either. So I mean, just becoming Catholic and finding Jesus, that doesn't help either. I mean, it does help. I mean, obviously it helps. Hello. But I'm saying that like,

[56:04] Dave: just being Catholic and going to mass, not taking any like real concrete steps. I mean, [56:12] Dave: if you've got a problem, first of all, admit that you've got the problem. Practical advice. If you're being tempted, do not stay quiet about it. Talk to somebody.

[56:24] Rebecca: Yeah. And that's where AA comes in handy. I mean,

[56:29] Rebecca: you can call anybody in any AA meeting. But again, I hate to be so anti AA, but it's like you go to an AA meeting and then you say,

[56:37] Dave: hey, I've been thinking about using, you are just advertising that you are a potential drug buyer to some fairer person.

[56:44] Rebecca: But I've come in contact with weight, but my alcohol is my problem though. So I don't really know this. Right, right, right. Yeah. For me, alcohol never really bugged me.

[56:53] Dave: It was, it's straight up like heroin.

[56:56] Dave: Find a priest then.

[56:59] Dave: Well, you could find a priest. You could go to confession. You could talk to a friend, your girlfriend. I mean, just the point is being honest, right? I mean,

[57:08] Dave: a lot of the reason my people use drugs is they do see this kind of hypocrisy and culture.

[57:14] Dave: And yeah, I mean, just being honest with yourself about your situation and being honest with your partner, your spouse, your closest friend, telling them, well, see, that's hard. But when you can do that, I'm really lucky to still have my parents who have been able to make amends with my parents and to be able to talk to them about issues that I'm having or to find suggestions on. I bet they're so proud of you right now.

[57:48] Dave: Ah, I just hope that they forgive me for putting them through everything that I did. My parents do, yeah. You know, I guess, so don't let these things just brood around in the darkness, right? That's, it's just going to continue to grow and grow and grow until all of a sudden

[58:07] Dave: you're going to, you're going to wind up using and wondering how the hell you got there, right?

[58:13] Dave: That's number one. Number two is I cannot stress enough. I mean, I between, between cutting the people out of my life that were into drugs, number one, and then when I became, you know, right wing, whatever, you know,

[58:30] Dave: I don't even know if right wing or conservative, I don't know. But a nationalist maybe, these different ideas, like when I came out with those as espousing that kind of stuff, anybody that I hadn't already cut out of my life left me.

[58:46] Guest-1: So I got a fresh start.

[58:49] Guest-1: I didn't have to worry about baggage from friends that I had, you know,

[58:53] Dave: lived down the street from and like, oh, well, you know, it's so and so I got to go to their house, you know, be very careful about who you surround yourself with. Yeah. You know, are you surrounding yourself with people that are going to help you lead a successful life? Right. Or people who are going to bring it down. And everybody really knows the answer to that when they think about it.

[59:16] Dave: Yeah. Yeah.

[59:18] Dave: Thank you so much for joining me, Dave.

[59:19] Rebecca: It's such an inspirational story. And when I was thinking about who I should talk to, I don't, I don't know that I know anybody that's come as far as you have after having such a very, very serious addiction. And when I talk to you about, about my problems and everything, I'm always met with a lack of judgment and an amount of understanding that is just unparalleled. And I really appreciate that on a personal level. And I'm sure the audience does. I saw a lot of people in the live chat that are like, this is exactly what I needed to hear.

[59:47] Rebecca: So yeah, if you guys are struggling, feel free to reach out. And Dave's links are all in the description below. So that's where you can find him on his media. And if there's anything else you want to say, Dave Riley. Riley.

[60:01] Rebecca: I'm really sorry.

[60:02] Rebecca: I was just going to say, look, I got, for now, until I get to platform from Twitter,

[60:07] Dave: my DMs are open. If anybody needs to talk or whatever, I've always been pretty open. And, you know, whatever it is that I can do to help. I've run a YouTube channel. I'm thinking about streaming a little bit more off and on. It's youtube.com slash vokes catholica,

v-o-x-c-a-t-h-o-l-i-c-a. And we've got a couple of lecture series that are pretty good by Father Purdy. Um, I think that stuff might, might be helpful to a lot of people. So maybe go check that out and, um, you know, don't, uh, don't stay quiet. You know, uh, you're not alone. There's a lot of people that are going through a lot of bad things and it's going to get a lot worse. So, um, we're stronger together. And, you know, we should, uh, should be able to help each other out of this. And hopefully, um, come to some sort of spiritual rebirth, not just individually, but maybe even as a nation.

[61:01] Dave: Wow. What a lovely note to end on.

[61:03] Rebecca: I'm going to go ahead and end the stream so I can have a little cry. All right.

[61:07] Guest-1: Thank you, Dave. And thank you live chat.

[61:08] Rebecca: I'll see you guys later. Bye-bye. See ya.