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Introduction

On that momentous day in 2008, the neighborhood felt calm and holy, despite the constant shrieks of the children playing in the streets. I sat in the living room as the dusky glow from the setting sun bathed the house in gentle light.

Angie, my wife, bedridden with disabilities, was the only other person home. She peered at me, anxiety etched on her face, and I knew she was probably wondering if everything was all right.

I glanced at the wall clock and realized that over thirty-six hours had passed since I last ate any food or drank even a drop of water. My limbs felt feeble, but my mind and senses were keen. Besides the peculiar feelings, a sense of astonishment and tranquility quelled the pangs of hunger and thirst.

If I can endure the fast, I can also survive without drugs.

I was on a complete fast—an offering of repentance to God and a plea for divine healing. For the last two weeks, I had submitted myself to an indefinite, extended fast, with random breaks for small amounts of food and water.

Clutching a Holy Bible and a dated *Our Daily Bread* devotional in my hands, I prayed and meditated on God's Word and presence. The Lord convicted me of sin and disbelief, yet He saw me as worthy of His kingdom.

Amazingly, the drug cravings and the expected withdrawal pains had disappeared. I had always found it extremely difficult to stop taking drugs because of physical distress. The anxiety and depression that had besieged me for decades also faded away.

Since starting the fast, my insomnia vanished, and the food tasted better. For 25 years, I took a tranquilizer before meals to muster a good appetite and a strong sedative to make me sleep at night.

The Devil has fallen!

Not a single pill, or a drop of alcohol, or a puff of methamphetamine passed into my body. To live free and clean of any addictive substance for two weeks was a miracle. With God's help, I have remained sober up to the present time.

The Scriptures underscore the sacred power of prayer and fasting to bring about divine healing. God has instructed His people to fast for absolution and deliverance from extreme satanic bondage such as insanity, demonic possession, mental illness, drunkenness, and addiction.

Today, Christians and believers of various faiths fast for repentance, cleansing, spiritual awakening, and rejuvenation. Fasting also promotes physical and psychological well-being. Modern medical science also attests to the physiological benefits of fasting. It has been proven effective in the treatment and management of cancer, liver disease, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and other mental health disorders.

I was a polydrug user—addicted to methamphetamine (“meth” or “shabu”) and benzodiazepines, a group of medication that includes sedatives, tranquilizers, and antidepressants. Alcoholism also consumed me in my earlier professional life. Just like many addicts, I took a variety of drugs to enhance my total psychoactive experience and to produce an increased psychotropic (mind-altering) effect. I took “uppers” to be “high” and combined them with “downers” to induce calm, which prevented me from going over the edge.

In the drug world, the constant up-and-down intoxication is also called “living on a roller coaster.” My favorite “downers” were diazepam and midazolam. The pills provided relief for my anxiety, depression, restlessness, and insomnia; meanwhile, meth supplied me with euphoria.

My dependency on drugs, coupled with alcoholism, sent me to the hospital roughly nine times and to a drug rehabilitation facility twice. However, these interventions failed to bring lasting recovery.

Drugs and alcohol are two of the most popular but dangerous substances people use to escape from the miseries in life or to have some plain fun. Like fast food, a pill, a shot of brandy, or a line of cocaine is easily within reach. Ancient organic substances, including alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, marijuana, and opium remain widespread in most parts of the world. New synthetic narcotics such as Ecstasy attract young users because of their novel psychotropic effects.

Drug dependency is a global crisis; every home is a target or a victim. According to the *World Drug Report 2020* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), approximately 269 million people used at least one drug in 2017. In a World Health Organization (WHO) report published in May 2020, it was found that tobacco kills over eight million people yearly. In addition, the WHO 2018 Global Status Report attributed three million deaths or 5% of all global deaths in 2016 to alcohol. The Philippines' Department of Health reported that there are about four million drug dependents in the country (Mindanao Summit Report, Nov. 2017). From 2018, eye-popping caches of meth and cocaine are frequently flashed on newspapers and TV screens. Despite the government's intensive efforts in curbing drug addiction—mainly through supply reduction and relentless drug arrests, raids, and seizures—the menace persists.

The costs of addiction are high. Drugs shatter family and social lives, compromise upright values, and disrupt education and work. Addicts become vulnerable to AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and other deadly diseases. Addiction also causes or exacerbates mental illness.

Many people don't possess sufficient and accurate knowledge of the scourge of addiction. Ask a person on the street to define drug dependency, and he probably will not utter a quick reply. Yet, it is highly probable that this problem exists in his home. It's a serious topic, often a dark one, for many people. They refuse to probe deeper into the aspects of addiction because it reminds them of

their helplessness and the havoc their families experience because of their addiction.

When addiction strikes, the family is stunned. Rather than taking the right steps, the family members panic, rationalize, and conceal that a crisis exists. Many are more concerned with the social stigma that comes with drug abuse. They ask: *What will our neighbors and friends think?* On the other hand, the addict quickly justifies that it is not her fault that she fell into the destructive habit. She shrugs and proclaims: *The whole world is unfair and full of pain.*

Despite society's innovative legislation surrounding legalization and decriminalization to curb drug dependence, we still wrestle with how to rescue lost souls caught up with harmful substances. We question why our child gets hooked on street drugs and turns into a bum, despite our love and support.

This book demonstrates how God rescues addicts and alcoholics from the besetting tyranny of drug addiction and guides them toward lasting sobriety, recovery, and redemption. It relies on the Holy Bible as its foremost authority and resource, giving utmost care in the faithful adherence to scriptural doctrines. Data from authoritative sources, personal experiences, observations, and testimonies are referenced to substantiate the truth: we are up against an Unseen Enemy.

The essence, understanding, and conquest of substance compulsion are comparable and applicable to other forms of addictions—gambling, digital obsession, food, and other behavioral bondage. If we sneak into the psyche of a person under enslavement, we will find Satan.

My narratives in this book depict how common vulnerabilities, dysfunctional life circumstances, tragedies, and attachments to the cares of this world can make a person faithless and separated from God.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, I was vice president and a principal shareholder of our family firm (Fema Group), one of the top

3000 firms in the Philippines for two decades. Tragedies in the family and business pushed me deep into drugs and alcohol. I fell from the pinnacle of wealth and success to the depths of defeat and despair. Our company closed in 2000, and my wife was paralyzed in 2002 due to a massive stroke. These extreme emotional aches and traumas almost cost me my sanity. In 2017, she also contracted stage-four breast cancer. My beloved Angie passed away in May 2020.

Under bondage for thirty-six years, I experienced and witnessed Satan's relentless and cunning attacks to compel me into his fold. After many unsuccessful treatments and incarcerations, Jesus finally intervened in my life. Despite the family tragedies and loss of valuable relationships, material possessions, and social stature, I have found hope and a new life in Christ. He wiped out my addictions and transformed me into a new creation. He alone drove out evil from the deep recesses of my soul.

The defining motive that moved me to give up taking drugs is the trembling fear that I would eternally rot in hell if I remained a doper. The tremendous guilt and anguish I have inflicted upon myself, my family, and others also became unbearable.

Since 2002, it has been a privilege to share the Scriptures with residents of the Marikina Rehabilitation Center (MRC). Ministering to people in recovery, along with their families in their homes, is also an eye-opener for me on how deep addiction harms the household.

Beyond the diverse secular and professional diagnoses of addiction, it is a revelation that evil lurks in the minds and souls of these drug dependents. As long as Satan is in control of the life of the addicts, drug dependency is chronic and difficult to vanquish.

The ultimate message of this book is that recovery from substance abuse is also about the redemption of the addict from his fallen and sinful state. The road to sobriety is lined with perilous traps and sharp spikes that an addict must surmount to gain true freedom. There's no easy way out. Satan does not just give up.

Yet, with God as our Helper and beacon, addicts can regain control and put order back in their messed-up lives. Maintaining sobriety with a sound mind is a primary goal. Many former addicts who remain drug-free for a long time may still show behavioral abnormalities because genuine sobriety is not achieved. Divine healing assures full recovery of the body and redemption of the soul.

This book is primarily intended for drug dependents, alcoholics, people in recovery, and their families who are held bondage by addictive substances. Many descriptive passages and testimonies in this book attest to the severe and arduous battle with addiction. Positive traits and habits are illustrated, including ways to overcome common barriers that hinder recovery.

This book also emphasizes the constructive roles of families and institutions in providing proper recovery measures and support. Rehabs, churches, support groups, public officials, and lawmakers can also gain added insights and knowledge from this book. Every individual, home, community, or nation is a target of or prey to the drug contagion.

This book is also a great resource, especially during this pandemic. When traditional methods of recovery may not be ideal in rehab, where social distancing and other preventive measures can't be fully implemented, God heals in the confines of our homes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us our utter helplessness on things unseen. Once again, like the Israelites, our faith and reliance on God are being tested as we face death, starvation, and the reality of a radically new way of life. Despite the virus, the drug menace remains.

Ultimately, drug abuse is a spiritual concern—a battle between good and evil. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

We live in treacherous times. Humanity departs from how God wants us to conduct our lives. We adore false gods, celebrities, rock stars, jobs, pleasures, and possessions. Lord Mammon escalates his onslaught upon humankind, as money and all things unholy replace God as the object of man's treasures and desires.

Worshiping drugs is a slice of what humanity does in pursuit of Satan. The incessant desires of the flesh eclipse the obedience to God. Many people seldom go to Sunday church services, spend quality time with their families, or volunteer in city orphanages. Instead, they prefer to shop and linger in fancy malls, play wild digital games, bask in social media all day long, or get smashed with alcohol and mind-altering substances.

This book will help bring weary and desperate drug users and alcoholics on their knees to worship God as Creator and Divine Healer. God created man to praise and exalt Him. We must offer ourselves to God as an act of love and worship, not sacrifice our bodies to Satan in exchange for instant gratification. I hope and pray that the Lord will fill our homes, which have been trampled by many years of grief and desecration, with serenity, love, and healing.

Addiction as Idolatry

*For you have spent enough time in the past doing
what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery,
lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable
idolatry.*

—1 Peter 4:3

Early one morning in 2001, I wandered around the house with a single thought burning in my mind. The disconnected power lines sucked the life out of our home. In the gloomy half-light, I could see the few scattered pieces of furniture—an end table, chairs, a lamp—strewn through the living room and the hallway. Most of the appliances were gone.

Angie reclined silently in bed on the second floor because of her disabilities. All of our three children were out of the house.

Restless and jittery, I headed outside toward my favorite spot—a round patch of rough concrete in the middle of our yard. Wild, green shrubs surrounded the lawn, and a tall Narra tree stood majestically in a corner against the sunny sky.

I paced in circles. My nerves snaked through my pores, crawling in and out of my skin. A painful knot also twisted in my gut.

I've got to get that meth fix. Now! But I have no money.

The intense cravings awakened my crafty, criminal mind. A sinister force compelled me to the living room. I grabbed an oriental vase from on top of my wife's china cabinet—*this is adequate for a drug swap*. I also swiped the wall clock beside the stairway—*it could also suffice as cab fare to the meth house*.

Driven by a desperate need to get high, I hurriedly hailed a taxi. The drug dens were about fifteen minutes away in a busy underbelly of Quezon City. They sporadically dotted a congested compound where most residents were poor.

Upon arrival at the meth zone, I begged the cab driver to accept the wall clock as taxi fare. "I'm sorry, but I have no money," I said. With a grim face, he reluctantly nodded, took the clock, and sped away.

The drug-infested district teemed with users, pushers, runners, and other shady characters darting in different directions. As a regular buyer, I became familiar with the place and knew the dealers and runners by name. Many would swarm all over me whenever I arrived.

Rickety, tiny houses lined the narrow, winding streets inside the compound. Many indigents operated the meth dens in a discrete, but busy manner. Sometimes, the whole family, including young children, was actively involved in the business. As a hidden street bazaar, one could shop around and bargain for drugs. Young children, senior citizens, pregnant mothers, and odd characters milled around and waited for their turns at the day's favorite spot. Addicted police officers always got exclusive use of the place. The preferred den offered the best buy—that is, it is the lowest price, of the best quality, or the most quantity.

Drug characters and wary bystanders lurked in the pathway entrance waiting for new or familiar faces to show up. Like seasoned salespeople, young underlings of pushers competed with one another and swarmed over any arriving, prospective buyer. These charlatans also possessed an uncanny sense of discernment on whether a prospect had ample money for drugs. Congenial and persuasive, they rambled their pitches and pulled the arms of customers to patronize their turf.

Sellers, dealers, runners, or other users often joined or sneaked uninvited into a drug session, took free hits, and gave a friendly rapport. This exasperating practice would often slash the

meth purchased by a buyer. However, the dealer would sometimes add free portions if he felt happy or generous. A code of reciprocity prevailed in the dens in which a buyer who shared his drug could have the favor returned the next time he came around. Over time, regular users became comfortable with their circle of dealers and user-friends.

Frauds were common occurrences in these dens, including bizarre, disappointing, infuriating, and scary incidents. A dealer or runner would sometimes vanish in the busy compounds after receiving advance payment for takeout meth. The buyer would curse or scream in frustration after waiting for nothing or for the drug to arrive six hours later. These tricksters often pooled cash payments from several buyers, purchased meth in bulk at a discount, and earned extra cash or portions of meth. They also passed fake meth (made of alum) that looked similar to the real stuff.

A handgun could sometimes be seen tucked in the waist of the dealer in a drug deal. In one session, I saw a firearm on top of a table, alongside worn-out glass pipes, used aluminum strips, and cheap lighters.

One horrifying incident that will stay imprinted on my mind forever was the time I witnessed the accidental death of an infant in the drug lair. A drug-crazed, gun-wielding man intruded our meth session on the ground floor of the den. The stranger pointed the weapon at me and asked, "Is he the one?" He fired the gun, but a companion of the gun-wielder deflected his arm upward toward the ceiling. The stray bullet accidentally hit a baby on the second floor. I panicked and bolted out of the room, pushed past hanging clothes and empty wooden crates, and out into the crowded streets. The high from meth instantly vanished. Instead, a pang of trembling guilt consumed me because a baby had died in my place.

I never knew the culprit or learned the exact circumstances of the incident. However, this horrific episode didn't frighten me enough to stop taking meth. I even went back to the same spot.

Let us get back to my main story. I approached my favorite dealer, uttered a quick hello, and offered the vase in exchange for drugs. After some crude haggling, he agreed and gave me a small sachet of the prohibited substance. I didn't mind the cheap valuation of the vase; it had to go for my needed drug fix. I was more concerned that my wife would notice that it was missing.

Drug dealers seldom entertained swap deals, but typically yielded to regular clients. Sometimes, they would request a favorite comic book, a video, or anything that speaks to their fancy in exchange for drugs.

My hands trembled as I poured the meth into a thin, long, rectangular strip of aluminum foil. I heated the drug with a lighter, puffed its grayish smoke, and wallowed in its strong, initial kick of exhilaration.

The time to leave had come, and I hailed another cab for home. On arrival, I excused myself from the driver and dashed toward the house. Again, I grabbed another wall clock, ran back to the cab, and handed it to the driver as cab fare. After I flashed a stern "take-it-or-leave-it" stare, the poor cabbie relented.

Home at last. The daunting and exhausting part of the day was done.

Soaring on meth, I wandered in a repertoire of useless thoughts and activities. Surfing the internet on peculiar subjects such as astronomy or clandestine espionage was my favorite past time. I once clicked on the CIA website, took their online character test, and passed. The site responded I was competent enough for covert operations. I knew, however, that my application couldn't be completed because I'm not an American citizen.

After more hours of meaningless meanderings, the euphoria wore off. Again, my nerves flared up, and that familiar aching knot formed in my gut. I also felt edgy with the pestering withdrawal pains.

It is time for my benzodiazepines.

I took a few tablets of diazepam to soothe my rattled body and make the ache in my stomach go away. For three decades, I

always stocked a ready supply of tranquilizers and took an average of eight (50-mg.) pills per day.

My body could endure a day without meth or alcohol, but running out of pills was unthinkable. The gnawing and excruciating withdrawal aches, which surface after twelve hours from the last intake of pills, were dreadful.

After several hours, the calming effect of the tranquilizers dissipated. Once again, my cravings for more meth appeared. I prepared and smoked another line of the drug from the extra stash I brought home from the drug lair. With a renewed high, I again pandered in a pointless, digital journey on the computer.

To cap the day, I took a strong sedative (midazolam) to knock me off to sleep. In sum, I consumed three types of drugs in twenty-four hours. Another typical day in the life of an addict had passed.

Thirty-Six Years of Bondage

Then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

—Deuteronomy 8:14

I started using drugs at the age of nine. My grade school classmates and I found out that speed (amphetamines) and memory pills were helpful when we were preparing for exams. The stimulating effects sharpened our minds during tests, but also caused sleepless nights. These first experiences with amphetamines marked the beginning of my long struggle with drugs and alcohol.

In high school, my friends and I often spent nights at a classmate's house under the guise of studying. Once the parents were asleep, we would take pills and drink alcohol.

Flower power, Woodstock, the peace sign, and psychedelic substances swept the whole world—but especially North America—in the 1960s and 1970s. Many students, myself included,

sported waist-long hair and other hippie-like fashions of the time. We idolized rock stars and emulated their perverted manners and lingo. Listening and gyrating to the blaring rock music of the Rolling Stones and Black Sabbath, while strung out on pot, was our favorite pastime. I used to get goosebumps whenever Jimmy Page walloped his lead guitar performing “Stairway to Heaven.”

We had access to an array of illicit substances available in the nooks and alleys of Manila. Marijuana was inexpensive and popular with students. We also used LSD, amphetamines, tranquilizers, barbiturates, hashish, and heroin. During parties, we inhaled anesthetics dispensed from a spray glass bottle. To test its intensity, we often bashed our heads against a wall. The numbness also doused our shyness, allowing us to approach girls for a dance easily.

Over-the-counter medicines, such as cough syrup, were also easy to obtain and could induce mind-altering effects. Narcotic laws were lax. Government authorities, including pharmacy assistants, were uninformed about the addictive properties of the latest products.

LSD was very popular. The song “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” by the Beatles is often considered about a drug trip—the title itself is thought to be a nod to the acronym “LSD.” This substance induces amazing, but frightening colored hallucinations. During my first trip, the effects made me see roads rising from the ground and small butterflies transforming into huge ones. Once, my friends and I went to a mountainside vacation house for an LSD trip. Some of us had to stay sober so we could restrain others from walking off the cliff if they had a bad trip. I had one friend who was institutionalized in a mental hospital after experiencing the harmful effects of the drug.

Our adventurous spirit led us into a countless number of unforgettable and reckless experiences while loaded with narcotics and alcohol. Despite our despicable behavior, we excelled in class and held key positions across school organizations and inter-

school associations. At my high school graduation, I climbed the stage to receive an honors medal while high on pot.

After high school, our peer group broke up because we all went to different universities. In college, I continued using drugs, and my dependency became destructive. Disorientation, lack of focus, and an impaired memory affected my studies. Once, I threw up beside the school guardhouse in broad daylight because I consumed too much cough syrup. For the first time in my life, I failed some of my subjects, and I experienced panic attacks in class.

Going to school became torture. I was not used to being a mediocre student. Depression and a sense of worthlessness drove me deeper into using other illicit substances. Surprisingly, I hurdled college with a liberal arts degree. Many of my memories from that time, however, remain hazy—including memories about things I learned in class.

After college, I landed a job as a scriptwriter at the National Media Production Center, a government-owned media outfit. After six months, I quit the job and joined my father in our family business. Because I was the eldest son, Dad told me I should succeed him someday as president. Following Chinese business tradition, I started in the lowest ranks and worked my way up the corporate ladder.

I married Angie in 1981, and God blessed us with two sons, Arvin and Aries, and a daughter named Janine. I drew so much joy and comfort from my family. We lived in luxury and had all the trappings of a coveted lifestyle.

However, hedonism and extravagance became the paradigm of our everyday living. We even had four telephone lines inside the house. I used to pick up takeout food after work, despite the knowledge that adequate food was at the dinner table at home. Seeing that dinner was just not good enough, I would finally call for a food delivery service. We abhorred any discomfort. Whenever power disruptions occurred in the neighborhood, we often checked-in into five-star hotels.

We attended church on Sundays, but my presence was devoid of sanctity and worship. I often stood outside smoking cigarettes during the service while looking at girls or thinking about more money.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, I was a director and vice president of our family corporation, engaged in international trade, distribution, and support of office and retail systems. Beneath the success and wealth, however, I became an alcoholic and a benzodiazepine addict.

These substances couldn't seriously hurt me.

I was wrong. I caught a dangerous liver disease and spiraled down into a chasm of drunkenness and bondage. I wanted to believe that drinking alcohol was an essential and customary practice for socialization and doing business. Drinking and girls were nightly escapades with friends, local clients, foreign visitors, and business partners. I gambled in casinos and pandered in promiscuity. Because of my depraved lifestyle, I frequently came home late and spent less time with my wife and children.

This is the life I had dreamed of—full of pleasure and worldly delight.

I knew I became a full-blown alcoholic when I started to drink before breakfast. My hands always trembled, and my body would break out into a cold sweat (delirium tremens) if alcohol was not running in my veins. Whenever these maladies showed up, I would reach for a shot of whiskey as an instant remedy. While driving, a bottle of liquor was often tucked under the front seat of my car, which I could effortlessly pull out for a needed swig. In the office, another bottle of whiskey was also accessible in the bottom drawer of my desk.

After seeing blood in my urine, and the added family pressure that I should seek help, I consulted a psychiatrist. “You are committing slow suicide,” he retorted. The doctor diagnosed me as an alcoholic and prescribed anti-anxiety medication and antidepressants to curb my alcoholism.

The medicines successfully wiped out my cravings for alcohol and eased the pains of withdrawal. As a bonus, these pills produced slight euphoria—a fantastic buzz in the head. I felt good

and worked better because the annoying hangovers and cravings for alcohol disappeared. My family was pleased because I often went home early after work.

I could settle and be happy with these pills for the rest of my life!

However, these medications soon became a nightmare and another source of dependency. Without them, I could not function and work properly. The pills substituted my addiction to alcohol. A pillbox was always tucked in my pocket so I could quickly reach them at any time. If I missed a dose, my nerves would go haywire, and a painful, squeezing knot would form inside my belly.

I realized the difficulty and hesitation that doctors contend with in prescribing these medications to ward off alcoholism. Like alcohol, benzodiazepines are just as addictive. Most of the time, I exceeded my maximum daily dosage and popped these tablets like candies. My physician always scolded me for the abuse and prescribed substitute pills of different brands, types, shapes, and colors. However, my addiction remained. Despite my protests, he also scaled down my prescription.

To ensure my desired supply of pills, I approached several doctors on rotation, claiming I had insomnia. Physicians were sympathetic to people who can't sleep. I also tricked pharmacies by faking prescriptions. As a registered nurse, my wife had a MIMS (Monthly Index of Medical Specialties) pharmacy book. It enumerated all the medications in the market, including dosages, use, and effects. Over time, I tried most of the medicines listed under the sedatives and tranquilizers group. These unlawful acts had also saved me a considerable amount of money that could have gone to the physicians' fees.

My family preferred the tranquilizers over liquor because the pills resulted in less trouble in our lives. I survived for two years without alcohol, but I soon relapsed and mixed them with pills—a dangerous combination.

Finally, my wife admitted me to a hospital basement (my first treatment) at the Makati Medical Center for alcoholism and addiction to pills. The doctors gave me controlled doses of

benzodiazepines to ease the withdrawal pains. I found it strange to be confined to a treatment facility and have my addiction sustained with reduced amounts of pills. I felt I was just on a vacation break.

After three weeks, my attending physician discharged me from the hospital with a firm order that I should stop drinking liquor. For maintenance medication, he again prescribed anti-anxiety pills and antidepressants so I could be sober with controlled and minimized addiction. I surmised the doctor thought it would be better if I remained as a “functional” pill addict than be a drunkard, further damaging my liver and causing more trouble to other people.

Though I was no longer using illicit drugs, my drinking habits became worse. My father often admonished me whenever my drinking made me miss work. However, I always redeemed myself by clinching big deals for the company. Scratching his head, my helpless father often felt perplexed and disgusted because he had a paradoxical son.

Despite my apparent depravity, people still looked at me with respect and high regard. They blindly saw a successful man in a suit. However, behind the wealth and success, a vile spirit strangled my soul.

Between 1985 and 2001, I was admitted around eleven times to several hospitals and drug rehabilitation centers for alcoholism and drug addiction. I failed to achieve lasting recovery and sobriety from these interventions.

The Altar of Meth and Pills

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

—Colossians 3:5

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites became restless, waiting for their leader Moses who went up to the mountain to meet with

God. Driven by desperate anxiety and their ever-wavering faith in God, they looked for another deity to worship. They chorused, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him” (Exodus 32:1[b]). Led by Aaron, they gathered and melted all their gold earrings, and formed a golden calf (vv.2-4). They built an altar in front of the idol and “sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings” and celebrated with feasting and drinking, indulging in pagan revelry” (v.6).

The story of the golden calf is one of the greatest scandals in the desert experience of God’s chosen people. King Jeroboam also built two golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12: 25-33). Despite God’s love, as evidenced by their deliverance from the tyranny of Egypt, the Israelites often doubted His sovereign love and supremacy.

The idol reveals man’s innate need to worship and its tendency to stray away from revering the true God. Today idolatry still pervades as a multitude of people continue to adore false gods: money, possessions, pleasure, and drugs.

*Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is
really your God, your functional savior.*

—Martin Luther, Augustinian monk

Under bondage for thirty-six years, I lived in a world where reality could be temporarily changed with mind-altering substances. I always thought that life would be a bore without dope and alcohol. From 1999 to 2007, meth and pills controlled my life. This lifetime mistake had led me to a dark abyss of depravity and self-imposed suffering.

I endured the daily and grinding pursuit of drugs—aimless and incessant scrambling to raise money, endless waiting, constant scouring for a good source, and just wasting time on drug tripping. The euphoria and tranquility from the drug hits were worth the agony and exhaustion of the hunt for these substances. The meth and pills served as my escape from a depressed and humdrum life.

With military precision, I planned and carried out humiliating and horrifying schemes to feed my addiction. I pawned and sold things to friends and strangers and peddled used pots and pans to neighbors. A nearby junk shop became my regular and instant source of cash. I sold copper wires, steel gates, and other metal taken from the house. The overwhelming drug cravings anesthetized all the guilt and shame I developed because of my actions.

I have often felt I have forsaken my family. Two of my three children dropped out of school due to financial difficulties. Our electricity and water lines were disconnected for about two years because of the unpaid bills. We lit candles at night and used mosquito nets inside our modern bedrooms.

I fetched water at two pesos per five-gallon container from a neighbor outside the subdivision. Since the source was about 250 feet away, I had to use a cart and parade back and forth in full view of my rich neighbors. It took several trips to fill all the drinking jugs in the kitchen and water buckets in the bathrooms on the ground and second floors.

Despite the adversities and addiction, I mustered the strength to take care of Angie and my family by ensuring that food, at the very least, was served at the dinner table. Something good was still inside of me.

Every time I felt a wave of guilt coming on, I would rush to the drug den or my home stash, drowning my troubles in the pleasure of drugs. They always had a quick and effective way of washing every negative thought away.

I was hesitant to admit that drugs were essential in my life. Pride and denial prevented me from confessing I was addicted to meth and downers. I couldn't accept the truth that my life was miserable because of drugs.

Edward Welch, author of *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, wrote: "Addiction is a bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending

itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God.”¹

Raising cash to buy drugs was my number one daily priority—every day, every hour. Each moment seemed to be drug-related. Without a job, I learned to be extra resourceful and skillful in both manipulation and deception to satisfy both my bad habits and the needs of my household. Getting back to work was hard because of depression and phobia. Guilt and denial consumed me. I couldn't move on.

If I had any money, I used it to first purchase (with no prescription) some tranquilizer pills at a nearby pharmacy. Next, I would rush to the drug den to buy and smoke meth and purchase extra portions for later use at home. The tranquilizers neutralized the panicky effect of meth and produced the needed guts to deal with the loud and menacing drug dealers and runners.

This daily routine left me with little or no time to help clean the house, wash dishes, bond with my family, read a book, or even take good care of myself. Nutrition was trifling as eating was often a chore, not a joy. One thing I had positively gained, however, was plenty of physical exercise from the constant and grueling hunt for money and drugs. God, prayer, and other spiritual matters were always set aside. I was guilty of idolatry.

[Manasseh] erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them.

—2 Kings 21:3[b]

The grim, odd, and amusing accounts of addicts desperately trying to raise money for drugs are numerous and diverse. Drug dependents can muster enormous strength and go to extreme lengths to get meth, pot, or other substances to satisfy their cravings.

The WHO defines addiction as the “repeated use of a psychoactive substance or substances, to the extent that the user (referred

to as an addict) is periodically or chronically intoxicated, shows a compulsion to take the preferred substance (or substances), has great difficulty in voluntarily ceasing or modifying substance use, and exhibits determination to obtain psychoactive substances *by almost any means*" (italics mine).²

At the MRC, one resident sold their refrigerator from the second floor of his home to buy meth. He carefully lowered the appliance with a rope, through the terrace, so his family wouldn't notice. Another fellow claimed he sold his blood at a hospital in downtown Manila to raise money for drugs. I also learned he did this despicable act more than once. Edgar Allan Poe, the famous American poet and writer, escaped reality by using alcohol and opium. He wrote:

*I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. In the pursuit of pleasure, I have periled life, reputation, and reason. It has been the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom.*³

I also suffered from paranoia—a common, deep-seated psychological disorder experienced by meth users. Many residents of the MRC also claim that they often looked behind their backs, particularly when they were high on meth. They felt sure somebody was following or pursuing them when they were out on the streets. They also believed a police officer was always waiting outside the meth house, ready to grab them the moment they get out. After a meth session, I used to take a chain of quick commuter rides to evade these imagined people. Like in spy movies, I had to "lose my tail."

Likewise, I encountered recurring bouts of megalomania (self-delusion). Despite my miserable situation, I still felt I was a special person—superior to everybody else. Some MRC residents believe they gained superpowers or extrasensory perception.

A few declared they had acquired a “third eye.” Others reported they were “appointed descendants of a supreme being.” They also heard voices or suffered thoughts of condemnation. These dysfunctional behaviors, however, ordinarily disappear the moment an addict stops taking the substances.

Unfortunately, former users may still exhibit these abnormalities long after they’ve stopped using drugs. Depending on the severity of impairment, the repair of damaged brain cells due to heavy substance use may take many years.

Reverting to sobriety after a lengthy period of addiction is perplexing and traumatic. Addicts detest the sobering reality of suffering and imperfections. Adjusting back to reality is a radical shift that requires patience, courage, and perseverance—and this means experiencing again real-life pains and difficulties.

*For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient,
deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures,
spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating
one another.*

—**Titus 3:3, NASB**

God created man to worship Him. “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:12). Without godly adoration, people succumb to idolatrous atrocities. If a person is not exalting God, he is worshiping someone else and many things—money, power, job, ideology, possessions, himself, drugs, or the Unseen Enemy.

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Drug dependents worship Satan by indulging in addictive substances, vile revelry, and promiscuity. Drug dens, packed with

strung-out drug worshippers, reflect the present-day kingdom of Baal. Addiction is an idol. Barbara Brown Taylor wrote, “The simplest definition of an addiction is anything we use to fill the empty place inside of us that belongs to God alone.”⁴

Addicts, alcoholics, and sinners are headed toward doom. The loss of a job does not justify a person from committing theft so that he can provide for his family. In like manner, drug dependents are not vindicated from the use of drugs because of any personal ill or social injustice. Aside from losing faith, addicts are also steered to other sins: hedonism, lying, stealing, manipulation, and adultery.

In Galatians 5:19-21 (GW), it says:

Now, the effects of the corrupt nature are obvious: illicit sex, perversion, promiscuity, idolatry, drug use, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambition, conflict, factions, envy, drunkenness, wild partying, and similar things. I have told you in the past and I am telling you again that people who do these kinds of things will not inherit God's kingdom.

Other major faiths express similar repugnance regarding intoxication and drug addiction. In Islam, Allah Almighty states in the Noble Quran 5:90: “You who believe! Indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful.” Muslims strictly stay away from intoxicating liquor and addictive substances—an affirmation that humans can live and lead fulfilling lives without drugs and alcohol.

Likewise, Buddhists detest worldly pleasure, drugs included. The Dhammapada (Sayings of the Buddha) verse 216 states: “From craving arises sorrow and from craving arises fear. If a man is free from craving, he is free from fear and sorrow.” A research paper entitled *Buddhism and Addictions* by P. Groves and R. Farmer reads, “From a Buddhist perspective, addictive behavior may be

seen as a false refuge and a source of attachment which unwittingly, but inevitably, leads to suffering.”⁵

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything

—James 1:2-4

A significant vulnerability that causes a person to use drugs is the difficulty he experiences when faced with troubles in life. Death of a loved one, poverty, job loss, separation of a spouse, rejection, and depression are common gateways to addiction. Ask the street children in Manila why they sniff cheap household glue or solvent. “It takes away hunger” is a quick and frequent reply.

Life is never easy. Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Matthew 16:33). Maya Angelou, an American poet and civil rights activist, wrote, “You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.”⁶

To legitimize their bad habits, addicts internalize and proclaim these real or perceived reasons as excuses for taking dope. Instinctively, they also pass the blame for their plight to their parents, society, or the government. It’s tough to pry open the real feelings and mindset of a doper.

Addicts lack focus and cannot properly carry out even basic mundane tasks. Sweeping the floor, taking a needed bath, and doing other household chores and routines are often neglected. The quest and use of drugs take much of their time. They are practically left with no time for the most important aspects of life: God, family, and work.

Dr. Marvin Seppala, Chief Medical Officer of the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, revealed that drug use alters brain chemis-

try in its reward and pleasure centers. He said, “This can affect alcoholics and addicts to the point their brains re-prioritize what’s most important, such as eating and survival. It’s almost unfathomable that the survival instinct could be superseded by something else.”⁷

Having faith is the least or none of their concerns. Mustering true contentment is an aversion or extreme difficulty. Since becoming high, drunk, or stoned is their constant daily mission, God is often set aside, or worse, forsaken. Many addicts also doubt the existence of heaven and hell. If divine judgment comes, they believe God would spare them from eternal damnation because they think they are worthy of salvation. They also wryly assume that the end of the world is still remote. They believe they have all the time to reform and repent later in life.

A junkie spends half his life waiting.

—William S. Burroughs, writer and visual artist

Drug dependents spend an enormous amount of time looking for money and waiting for their favorite dealer to show up with their drugs. They also scour distant places for a good source of meth. An addict cannot rely on one dealer alone for his daily fix as all pushers recurrently run out of supply. Sometimes, ongoing police surveillance also hinders dealers from selling these illegal substances.

The punishing pursuit of drugs often takes a whole day to complete. Oddly, addicts find this debilitating and time-consuming struggle worthy once they snort a line of cocaine, pop a pill, or shoot their veins full of heroin.

Addicts learn and master patience, persistence, and salesmanship in drug-related matters and transactions. Also, they become adept at badgering and convincing friends and strangers for a loan. Like highly trained salespeople, addicts can quickly sell their used shoes, motorbikes, cell phones, and other stuff, even at ridiculous, giveaway prices. In extreme cases, they beg or resort to crime.

In the Philippines, police figures show that 17 percent of murder and homicide cases in 2016 were drug-related.⁸ Also, in the

United States, drugs and alcohol are associated with about 85% of offenses leading to imprisonment.⁹

Despite this wretchedness, addicts *know* the costs and dreary consequences of their actions. However, the pleasure of taking drugs often overshadows the expected dangers. An addict is like a skydiver who experiences fear from jumping out of an airplane but is later

Addicts know the costs and dreary consequences of their actions. However, the pleasure of taking drugs often overshadows the expected dangers.

compensated with exhilaration when the parachute opens. The greater danger from drug use usually creates more excitement—a notable reason why incarceration or lethal sanction doesn't effectively deter substance abuse.

Every day, addicts are trapped in a successive vortex of craving, tolerance, and withdrawal. They also seek at least the same satisfactory level of high they've got used to. Charlotte Kasl, author of *Many Roads, One Journey*, wrote: "Ultimately, the withdrawal symptoms exceed the body's physical tolerance for the substance, which means the addicted person lives in a constant state of withdrawal."¹⁰

The addicted cigarette smoker exhibits this syndrome. A nicotine addict often erroneously proclaims that smoking relieves tension and stress. Usually, these physical disturbances and irritations come from nicotine withdrawal and cravings, which can start just 30 minutes after the last cigarette.¹¹ Under these conditions, the smoker feels relieved at the moment he lights up another cigarette. The same symptoms also manifest in drug addiction and alcoholism.

There is no shortcut to recovery. The bumpy road to sobriety also entails the sustained love and support of the family, the church, and other support groups such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or NA (Narcotics Anonymous). However, after-care efforts are commonly deficient, misunderstood, or ignored. In the Phil-

ippines, there is a shortage of support mechanisms available to recovering addicts. Social stigma is also attached to a person who goes to these sessions.

The Costs of Addiction

Because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.

—**Jeremiah 30:17[b]**

In biblical times, leprosy was a dreaded disease. Apart from being physically afflicted from this deadly infectious ailment, the lepers were ostracized by the community. Leviticus 13:45-46 says: “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.” The lepers suffered physical and spiritual condemnation.

Like the lepers, drug addicts struggle with faith and suffering as they bear the rejection of society. As social outcasts, they also wrestle with sin and experience the burning shame and isolation brought about by substance abuse. Caught up in a fantasy world, they spend most of their time in bars, drug dens, street corners, or in the locked rooms of their homes. Comparable to leprosy, addiction worsens if left untreated. The scourge of substance dependency also affects the whole family.

Addiction devastates the mind, body, and spirit. It removes our love and faith in God and other people. Sin, faith, and disease are related. Pain, brokenness, illness, and death are significant and common consequences of addiction and sin. Jesus Christ preached the relationship between suffering, faith, sin, and divine healing on the streets of Jerusalem when He healed the sick. Mark 2:5 reads: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end,
it leads to death.*

—Proverbs 14:12

Despite the proven dangers of addictive substances to individuals and society, generations remain stalwarts in the use of drugs and alcohol. Death, disease, family separation, and job loss are some of the common consequences of substance dependency.

Robin Williams, a popular actor, and comedian, openly spoke about his bondage to cocaine and alcohol. In 2006, after completing an alcohol treatment program, he told *Good Morning America* that the chronic disease of addiction is “not caused by anything, it’s just there. It waits. It lays in wait for the time when you think, ‘It’s fine now, I’m OK.’ Then, the next thing you know, it’s not OK.”¹² He later committed suicide.

People aren’t scared of death as the ultimate result of substance abuse. Addiction is a scourge and a *lingering pandemic*. Today, tobacco is the biggest killer in the world. According to the *Fact Sheet* (updated July 2019) of the WHO, out of the one billion smokers worldwide, more than eight million are killed yearly. More than seven million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use, while more than 1.2 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to secondhand smoke.¹³

There are approximately 600 ingredients in cigarettes. When burned, they create over 7,000 chemicals. At least sixty-nine chemicals are known to cause cancer, and many are poisonous.¹⁴ *The British Medical Journal* reports that a smoker cuts 11 minutes of his life for every cigarette consumed.¹⁵

Alcohol is the second deadliest popular substance. The Global Status Report (2018) of the WHO indicates that more than 3 million deaths, or around 5 percent of all global deaths in 2016, were attributed to alcohol consumption.¹⁶ According to James R. Milam, Ph.D., and Katherine Ketcham in their book, *Under the Influence: A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism*:

Most alcoholics will die 10 to 12 years earlier than their non-alcoholic friends. Most will never receive treatment for their primary disease of alcoholism. Their death certificates will typically state “heart failure,” “accident victim,” “suicide,” or “respiratory failure” as the cause of death. The chances are that no one—physician, social worker, family member, or alcoholic—will diagnose the cause of the problem as addiction to alcohol.¹⁷

Drug overdose is also an epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) of the U.S.: In 2018, 67,367 people died from drug overdoses, making it a leading cause of injury-related death in the United States. Nearly seventy percent of those deaths involved a prescription or illicit opioid.¹⁸

Pop icon Michael Jackson died because of the substance *propofol* and a host of other medications;¹⁹ rock star Prince died of an overdose of *fentanyl* (50-100 times more potent than morphine).²⁰ According to the World Drug Report (2019), around 585,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of drug use in 2017.²¹

The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration of the United States (SAMSHA) reported that alcohol and substance abuse are second risk factors for suicide next to depression and other mood disorders. Alcoholics and drug addicts are six times more likely to kill themselves.²²

The health consequences of substance abuse, particularly people who inject drugs, are staggering. The UNODC disclosed that in 2017, from around 11.3 million users worldwide who inject drugs, approximately 1.4 million are living with HIV.²³ Tuberculosis is also one of the leading causes of death among drug users with HIV.²⁴ More than half of 585,000 reported deaths from drug use were the result of untreated hepatitis C leading to liver cancer and cirrhosis; almost one-third were attributed to drug use disorders.²⁵

Behind many murders, rapes, robberies, human trafficking, and other serious crimes are illegal drugs and alcohol. These substances

are also common denominators and precursors of many other social ills such as prostitution, gang violence, rebellion, and terrorism.

According to the UNODC report in 2015, data from 17 countries estimate that 37 percent of homicide perpetrators were under the influence of a psychoactive substance, in most cases alcohol, when committing the offense.²⁶

Addicts and alcoholics land in jail because of criminal offenses. In the Philippines, thousands are locked up in prisons for drug use or possession for personal consumption. In a report by CNN, sixty percent of over 4,000 inmates incarcerated at a Quezon City jail in the Philippines were admitted for drug offenses. This jail was built in 1953 to house only 800 people. Many prisoners could be released, but they can't afford the bail, which can be as little as 4,000 to 6,000 pesos (\$86 to \$129).²⁷ Possession of drugs can send a person to jail from twelve to twenty years if caught with less than five grams of marijuana, cocaine, or meth.²⁸

Drug offenders also face death. According to the Drug Policy Alliance, China executes between 2,000 and 15,000 people yearly for various drug offenses.²⁹ In many countries, drug possession is punishable by death if the quantity reaches the prescribed levels. Addicts do not mind the high costs of addiction. People also remain stubborn about the apparent dangers of substance abuse. Instead, they continue to revere drugs and heed the enticement of the Unseen Enemy.

Under God's Wrath

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

—Romans 1:29-31

In the ninth century B.C.E., a Phoenician princess named Jezebel married Ahab, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel. The Phoenicians worshiped a multitude of gods and goddesses, including Baal, the head of fertility and agricultural god of the Canaanites. When she arrived in Israel, she brought with her pagan practices and Ahab was influenced to build an altar to Baal (1 Kings 16:31[b]). Idol worship propagated throughout the land. Two pagan temples were built, one at Samaria with its 450 priests, and the other at Jezreel with its 400 priests. Jezebel expelled the true prophets of Jehovah from the land.

She became the first female religious persecutor in history. As the most wicked woman in the Bible, Jezebel advanced sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:20). She practiced sorcery (2 Kings 9:22) and killed the Lord's prophets (1 Kings 18:4[a]). Because she conspired to take Naboth's vineyard, she deceptively led Naboth to be accused of "cursing God and the King," which led to his death by stoning (1 Kings 21 5-14). In worshiping Baal, child sacrifice also perpetuated during these times (2 Kings 17:16-18).

The accounts of Jezebel reveal her evil influence of many kinds over people and nations. Idolatry, envy, murder, deception, promiscuity, and seduction marked her reign as queen of Israel.

Today, the spirit of Jezebel continues to reign in our lives. Idolatry, lust for power, greed, abortion, addiction, and other wicked sins and practices invade the family home and rule the social and political landscape across nations.

Paganism is also on the rise. After 1,000 years of the Nordic Age in Iceland, a temple will be completed where people can worship the Norse gods Odin and Thor. At Stonehenge, England, many modern-day pagans gather yearly to celebrate the Winter Solstice by greeting the rising sun like the ancient pagans.

Present-day drug addicts are like infidels who forsake God and worship pleasure. Heathenism also mirrors the contemporary curse of drug addiction to nations. Romans 1:18 (ESV) reads: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness

and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” God’s punishment is also unveiled when an individual suffers from chronic addiction. He could have been delivered to Satan for his idolatrous nature at an earlier time. Rehab, detox centers, AA, and NA do not work for him. First Corinthians 5:5 says: “Hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”

Even if the addict had repented for his sins, punishment might still follow. David confessed and sought forgiveness from the Lord after he committed adultery and murder involving Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. The prophet Nathan told David, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die” (2 Samuel 12:12-14). Forgiveness from God does not always revoke the natural consequences of our sins.

Nations suffer the toll of God’s anger because of spiritual decay. The Opium Scourge in China affected millions of lives in the 1700s. Western countries, mainly Britain, exported opium to China to obtain silk, tea, and other goods high on demand back home. Used for centuries as a medicine, the Chinese abused opium, which ultimately produced millions of addicts by the 1830s. Despite being outlawed with the corresponding arrests and executions, opium continued to proliferate in the country.³⁰

Today the scourge of addiction spreads across countries, producing increasing millions of addicts as drugs and alcohol replace God as the center of their lives. Drug kingpins, smugglers, traffickers, dealers, and users, altogether comprise the modern-day Canaanites, known in the Old Testament for their idolatry and wickedness.

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lead a dark, abysmal life in exchange for drugs. Addiction remains because the wrath of God is not removed.

In biblical history, God repeatedly unleashed severe or catastrophic punishment on the Israelites who practiced idolatry. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrated how God released His wrath because of the people's debauchery (Genesis 19:24-25). If a man or woman were found guilty, he or she would be stoned to death at the city gates (Deuteronomy 17:5). Likewise, the mass killing of people and livestock in idolatrous towns was commanded by God (Deuteronomy 13:15).

The stubbornness of the Israelites brought the ire of God. They idolized golden calves, disobeyed God, and often complained about many things. Because of their transgressions, God brought down from the heavens plagues, sickness, death, and other catastrophes.

The COVID-19 pandemic is possibly a clear illustration of God's wrath to a large part of a defiant and ungrateful humanity. Despite the blessings in our lives, we remain dissatisfied, stubborn, and disobedient to our Creator.

The Lord demands we worship only Him. He detests our reverence to money, possessions, and drugs. Perhaps, if cocaine, marijuana, and heroin were prevalent in Old Testament times, addicts would be brought to the city gates and, literally, stoned.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

—1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Sacrifice is an intrinsic part of worship. Our forefathers worshiped God by offering goats, bulls, sheep, or other animals as a burnt offering. God told Moses, "Make an altar of earth for me and

sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you” (Exodus 20:24).

On the other hand, the pagans offered food and their offspring as burnt sacrifices to idols. Leviticus 18:21 says: “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek [foreign deity], for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.” Manasseh, the evil king of Judah, “sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists” (2 Chronicles 33:6[a]). Today, addicts and alcoholics worship Satan by practicing black arts, sacrificing their health, families, jobs, and their sanity in exchange for drugs.

Our minds and bodies are God’s abode; we are made in His image (Genesis 1:27). “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Drug addicts, alcoholics, and cigarette smokers defile their bodies and deny they are God’s temple. Instead, they affirm and exercise their self-sovereignty—the right to do whatever they please with their bodies. They don’t walk by the spirit but feed the desires of their flesh.

Edward Welch, author of *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, added:

Drugs and sex are the modern golden calves erected by addicts to find meaning, power, and pleasure apart from God. Addicts often believe they have found life, but any payoff they experience is short-lived and deceptive. They are blinded by the fact that they are having a banquet in the grave. They are truly out of control, victims of their own lust.³¹

Vanquishing addiction as idols of the users’ hearts and minds is an enormous adversity. Addicts who seek the elusive path

toward wholeness and redemption face roadblocks as they grapple through their bondage.

God is our Great Healer. Following Christ denies Satan's dominion over our lives. A.W. Tozer wrote, "Our pursuit of God is successful because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us."³² We must depart from Satan and obliterate his altar of addictions by seeking the grace of God.