

Twenty Years In The Addiction War

by Bill and Brenda Faulkner

BILL'S PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

DEVASTATION: I felt crushed. I had never experienced pain like that. I felt disbelief. This was not in character for my son. At the moment I heard these words, "Scott is in jail for possession of a controlled substance and resisting arrest" my life turned into one big question mark. This situation was one for which I had no answers.

I felt numb, I walked through the house crying out, "Why, Lord, why?" I could not imagine why. I thought we had such a tight family. We love our children and I thought they knew that.

DISBELIEF: I could not come to grips with the reality of the situation. Scott had everything going for him. He was raised in a Christian home by parents who loved the Lord, each other and their children. This just didn't make sense. He was an all-state quarterback with a full-ride scholarship to play football in college. We were not irresponsible; I was not an abusive dad. Scott wasn't neglected. I just couldn't believe he would be involved with drugs. What did he have to escape? What was causing this? Maybe it wasn't his; maybe he was just carrying someone else's drugs.

FEAR: The thought of the reality of addiction began to crash in on me. I was paralyzed with fear for him. Fear for his future, fear for his life. I heard all the stories of drug related deaths, brain damage, suicide, devastated lives. Would he be able to overcome this horrible addiction, or would he destroy his life?

GUILT: Next, I was hit with overwhelming condemnation. What had I done wrong as a parent? Had I spent all my energy on my education and my ministry with none left for my children? How could I ever preach again? If my son's life was coming apart, what did I have to say to anyone else? I felt very unworthy to be a pastor. I called the deacons of the church together and told them what was going on and offered my resignation. Of course, they would not accept it. They prayed for us and stood by us, but I continued to struggle with feelings of guilt. I had to have done something terribly wrong in raising him.

Many Sundays I didn't want to preach. I didn't feel that I could preach with authority anymore. The last thing I wanted to do was counsel. I didn't have answers for my own family, much less anyone else's.

HELPLESS: For the first time in my life, I felt totally helpless. I couldn't fix the situation. I couldn't fix my son. All the principles that we had applied in our lives suddenly seemed empty and ineffective. Things that had once seemed so simple and obvious were now confused and unclear. I couldn't get a firm grip on anything. I felt like I was trying to hold on to jello. I felt so alone.

RESOLUTION: Finally, I was able to reconnect with God and realize that He knew what was going on and I could trust Him. I was really helped by a book I read. I can't remember which book it was. In the book the author pointed out something that helped me greatly. He pointed out that I didn't cause Scott's addiction, I couldn't control his addiction and I couldn't cure his addiction, but I could care. Those four principles (the four "C's") have been a real help to me.

Little did I know that phone call would begin a twenty-year journey that is still in progress. As far as we know, Scott is not using today. That is how we have lived these past twenty years – one day at a time. There have been days of great hope, and there have been days of despair. There has been progress and setbacks. There are times when he does well and times when he doesn't. I continue to hang on to the four "C's" and trust Scott to the Lord. We pray for his complete deliverance and healing.

HOPE: I have realized that all of us are responsible for the consequences of our choices. I am not responsible for Scott's choices nor am I responsible for the consequences of his choices.

Do his choices hurt? By all means they do, and the consequences hurt too. But, I am not responsible for them. For the most part, we have been able to release Scott to the Lord. We love him, we

pray for him, we accept him, but we no longer feel responsible. Neither do we enable him to continue to be irresponsible. We have set him free for the Lord to do in him all He wants to do.

BRENDA'S PERSONAL THOUGHTS

PAINFUL REALITY / POWERFUL DENIAL: I have edited my original manuscript – rather God did. He began to put you on my heart. He was showing me your faces and helping me to sense your pain. This is the third time I have shared this part of our lives in this kind of setting, and each time I prepare I have to face the stark, painful reality of having an adult child who is a drug addict and it still hurts so deeply. I would not have chosen this platform for sharing my life journey, but as I thought of other platforms, I'm not sure that I would choose any of those either. But, it is in the storms of life that we come to know our Father intimately. So, it is my desire to give you hope and encouragement today. Some of that may come as I retrace some of my own personal journey and you will be able to identify with the feelings that I will share.

Our first born son, the pride of our lives – struggling with relationships, grades, authority, purpose and direction, low motivation, attitude – what was wrong – if he were just more spiritual; if we had not moved so often; if I were a better Christian, a better Mom...grasping for answers, wanting this “fixed.”

When he would “hit another wall” we would think – “bless his heart, things just seem to go against him.” “Why don't things work out for him?” We spent hours on our knees asking God to bless him. You see, he was not what I would have called a rebellious child. He usually kept curfew, called when he was going to be late, went to church because he wanted to be there, did chores around home, participated in family times...but something was very inconsistent, very wrong. The thought that he was using drugs or drinking was just a ridiculous idea. Why would our son do something so contrary to our values? We weren't perfect parents, having begun the role at a very young age, we sort of grew up together. But, then we thought we had an ideal family – close, fun, stable, growing spiritually.

But the reality began to sink in – he was not managing life – it wasn't that he couldn't – he was choosing not to.

I can't explain the tremendous fear that came over me as I began to realize that **we** had a **huge** problem. Scott was, in fact, doing drugs and doing them heavily. It really did hit us like a ton of bricks.

He married his high school sweetheart; a beautiful, intelligent, highly motivated girl who loved our son very much – but even that was not enough to pull him away from what had become his first love – drugs. Their marriage lasted only two years.

The painful reality and powerful denial led to an.....

EMOTIONAL CRISIS: I have learned some things about myself in the last few years – one is that I had not grown up in an emotionally healthy home. My emotional needs were not met, my feelings were not validated, I did not know how to express emotions – I was a “stuffer.” But, a stuffer who wanted to control – circumstances, people, responses. When I realized that I could not control Scott's behavior, his choices – I became very angry. I thought I could say things to him that would make him stop this craziness. But I only built walls and hurled condemnation at him. I let my anger flow all over everybody. I felt shame, guilt, failure, confusion, doubt and despair. I was becoming bitter – why were other families not going through this – how could they think their kids were without fault (you know, those wonderful Christmas letters).

Bill and I handled this very differently and that caused a great deal of tension in our home. I wanted him to “do something”. He was – praying and waiting. Trying to balance that in my head and my heart was difficult – weren't we supposed to “put feet to our prayers?”

So, I came to an emotional crisis that really began my “letting go and letting God.”

QUESTIONS UNANSWERED:

- How could this have happened?
- Did God not love me?
- Did I really know God?
- Why would God allow such pain into our lives?
- Why wouldn't He fix this?
- Why were others seeing answered prayer?
- Weren't "good Christians" supposed to be blessed and protected?

Most of my questions and doubts were toward God – I suppose that ultimately they all were. How could we continue to serve when we didn't have our own home together. What could we possibly have to say to people about the victorious Christian life? There were times that I begged Bill to get out of the ministry. At least then everyone would not have to know our problems.

So, now I not only had an emotional crisis in my life, I also had a spiritual crisis.

BRENDA'S THOUGHTS ON LEARNING TO DEAL WITH THE PAIN:

- ***Learn to live by truth (we had taught it, now we had a crisis of belief) You see, God is who He says He is and does what He says He will do. The scripture says:***
- He will give perfect peace when our mind is focused on Him
- He never leaves us or forsakes us
- His grace is sufficient
- His Word is life
- He came to give life – more abundant
- He works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose

We began to take God at His Word.

- ***Discover the power of praise***

Turning from myself, my thoughts and focusing, fixing my gaze on Him, On His character and on His ways

Trusting Him beyond what I could physically see

He is the lifter of my head

- ***Empowered to Persevere***

We found that we could keep on keeping on – not in our own power – but we truly discovered the power of the indwelling Christ – not me but Christ in me

We found that a daily walk with God was vital. We had to stay before Him – to hear what He would say to us; how He would direct us; to receive His comfort and His wisdom

We found that there are many people who need to know that you can overcome. You can live the victorious life. We determined to be a lighthouse in a dark world. If I am not willing to be transparent to let others know my pain and yet to see God's faithfulness, who will let them know.

We now know that this does not identify us – we are not victims of a dysfunctional family – we are children of the living God who loves us too much to let us stay where we are – He will receive the glory from this – satan will not have the victory.

BECAUSE HE LIVES – I CAN FACE TOMORROW – HE IS ALREADY THERE!!

BILL'S THOUGHTS ON LEARNING TO DEAL WITH THE PAIN

1. Experience the power and peace of prayer:

We have learned by experience that you cannot pray and worry at the same time. Prayer dispels worry (Phil. 4:6). (Matt. 6:34)

2. Allow each other the freedom of expression:

We have learned not to be threatened by each other's emotional expression. Sometimes our emotion is expressed in fear, or hurt, or anger, etc. We have learned to give each other some emotional space without thinking we have to fix it.

3. Learn how to comfort each other:

There are times when your spouse just needs comfort. She does not need counseling, or steps of correction or instruction, she just needs to be comforted. Comfort takes the form of a hug a pat on shoulder, or an understanding smile. When we are hurting we need comforting, like when a child falls down and skins his knee. At that moment we don't tell him why he fell and how not to let it happen again. We pick him up and hold him close. We comfort him.

4. Seek help from others:

Don't try to go it alone. Get some counseling for yourself as well as your child. Brenda and I from time to time go to a counselor to keep things in perspective. Gather around you some faithful prayer warriors. When Peter was in prison, what was the church doing? They gathered together and they prayed for him. Our addicted children are in a prison house of bondage, and they need someone interceding on their behalf and so do we.

5. Learn to set boundaries and detach:

That means to realize where your responsibility begins and ends. If you don't set boundaries in your life, you will be trodden upon. Do not be an enabler. Do not do for them what they should do for themselves, and let them suffer the consequences of their choices.

6. Learn to live one day at a time:

To dwell on the past or to speculate on the future will defeat you every time. We cannot relive the past, and we don't know what tomorrow holds so just live today. Victory comes one day at a time.

7. Allow your child to be an adult: (if they are adults).

You cannot treat a 37 year old like he is 15, even if he is acting like it. The longer we treat them like children the longer they will act like children. The longer we do things for them that they should be doing themselves the longer they will stay dependent. They will never learn to accept responsibility until we allow them to experience the consequences of irresponsible choices.