Spiritual Remedies
FAITH, PRAYER & HEALING
Faith is the most powerful of all forces operating in humanity and when you have it in depth nothing can get you down.

—Norman Vincent Peale
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Part 2

Coping with Illness and Physical Challenges
The Road to Recovery

With a heart attack and a nasty recurring case of bronchitis to show for fifty years of smoking, Marge Waterbury knew she had to quit her two-pack-a-day habit. The question was how. The best she’d ever done over the years was stop for a few days—then start right back again.

So she turned to God, and sometimes through tears, she prayed: “I don’t have the strength to do this on my own, Lord. I need Your help.”

Then one morning, after eight months of fervent prayer, her craving, amazingly, was gone. Her prayer had been answered. “When I realized what had happened, I just started thanking God,” said Waterbury, after more than seven years without cigarettes.

With God’s help, Waterbury kicked her habit, but millions more still struggle to overcome addictions. Consider these statistics: Approximately twenty-eight million
children in the United States have parents or a parent who is an alcoholic. The Centers for Disease Control website notes that in 2015, 15.1 percent of Americans who were eighteen years of age and older were smokers, an estimated 36.5 million adults. In 2014, there were approximately one million heroin users in the United States. According to a March 29, 2017 article on theguardian.com and based on a study of almost eighty thousand people, “Heroin use among American adults has increased almost fivefold in the last decade.” Whether it’s tobacco, alcohol, gambling, marijuana, prescription drugs, street drugs, pornography, or even things like sugar, caffeine, or an addiction to social media or video games, addictions are rampant in our culture.

HOW ADDICTION HAPPENS
How do we become addicted to something in the first place? It usually starts as an attempt to “self-medicate” a severe emotional problem or trauma with alcohol, drugs, or other substances, says author and addictions counselor David Stoop, Ph.D., founder and director of the Center for Family Therapy in Newport Beach, California, adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and member of the executive board of the American Association of Christian Counselors. For example, a child who feels unloved or unwanted might begin to smoke marijuana as a teenager in an effort to rebel against his or her family or to get attention. Or a child who grew up watching one parent seek solace in too many glasses of wine or mixed drinks after fighting with the other may come to believe that drinking is a way to cope with pain and conflict. Of course, some people also move toward substance abuse or other addictive behaviors after the death of a spouse or a divorce in order to distract themselves from their pain or grief.

Addiction involves other factors as well. People with a deep-seated fear of rejection have been known to turn to sexual addiction to fill their emotional voids, while people who abuse food may overeat in a desperate attempt to control at least part of their lives, says Dr. Stoop.

While any number of emotional problems can make us vulnerable to addiction, emotions are only half of the story. The other part is how the powerful chemicals in tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sugar, and other substances actually do make us feel better. These chemicals find their way to receptors
Lynne Nichols’s story began with a desperate late-night phone call from her drug-addicted son, Ben, who had just been expelled from a sober-recovery house for using drugs again. He had no money, nowhere to go, and little hope left for himself. In fact, the large quantity of drugs he ingested was no accident, as Lynne soon learned. Lynne wrestled with the dilemma of whether coming to her son’s rescue yet again would be an act of love or just a continuation of her enabling. It is a quandary many mothers—many parents—face these days as drug addiction, especially opioid dependence, maintains its hold on our country.

Many years ago, I was Ben. I made a similar call. The walk to the phone was as difficult a journey as I had ever made. I fought it every unsteady step. But like with Ben, my options had reached a vanishing point. I was penniless, foodless, homeless; weakened by drugs and drink, dehydration, and hunger; broken in spirit, mind, and body. And yet I resisted. I didn’t want to make that call. A dozen times I paused, wanting to turn around and disappear into the night, disappear forever.

I made the call, collect. And when the voice answered on the other end I sagged with relief. All I could say was “Mom?” Not “help” or “hello.” Just “Mom.” That one word was the beginning of my way back.

A mother’s love is often our last refuge. I sympathize with Lynne’s worry that she was enabling her son. In a narrow sense perhaps she was. But a mother’s love is so much more than that. Sometimes it is the only thing on earth that can save us. I know mine saved me.
One who is powerful here. I’m powerless. And I need to do what He tells me to do on an ongoing basis.”

Tell others. Dr. Stoop observes that the people who truly overcome addiction are those who view recovery as an ongoing process, who continue to share the message of recovery with others, and who help others who are struggling. He says, “They never get to a place where they say, ‘I have arrived; I don’t need this anymore.’ They say, ‘I’m going to stay here because it continues to help me.’”

Pray for healing. Although Marge Waterbury didn’t have documentation that God removed her desire for cigarettes, she was convinced He did. And some experts say her miracle isn’t uncommon. One study that looked at twenty northern California Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) groups, for example, found that prayer helped drive out the use of alcohol. Those AA members who practiced the eleventh step in AA’s Twelve Steps—seeking “through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God…praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out”—reported being sober longer and felt like they had more purpose in life.

“I have talked to several people who were in the advanced stages of alcohol addiction who sought out Christian prayer for being delivered from alcohol. And I am convinced from my interviews with these people that the phenomenon does occur,” says Dr. Zeiders.

Have a vision. “Many people who are addicted have trouble understanding that God has a special calling for them, or they don’t know how to pursue it,” says Dr. Zeiders. “So if we give them a vision of who they really are and the things they can do if they enter into their calling, they’re going to be more likely to disengage from the activity that keeps them from it.”

Connect with a community. A solid church, a strong twelve-step program, or going to a counselor all offer positive, chemical-free alternatives to the addictive life. “If you get people connected with a really healthy, vital church community where they are understanding themselves as children of God rather than guys at a bar, where they are participating in things like outreach or volunteer services, where they are having a meaningful impact on society and they are playing a direct role—all of these things are tangible, practical ways to incarnate the vision and work against the addiction,” says Dr. Zeiders.

Discover true love. Since addicts fundamentally don’t believe they’re loved,
many find freedom when they discover that God loves and cares about them. “Providing those insights, helping the person own it and grasp it intellectually and feel it within his spirit, is going to be part of the healing,” says Dr. Zeiders.

A Prayer to Break Free from Addiction

God, I know You can help me overcome this addiction, and I’m so thankful, because I want to be free. Every time I come to You, I win another battle. Help me remember what Your Word says: You will never leave me or forsake me, and You love me no matter what. Thank You, Lord, for showing me who I am in You. Amen.

—Joyce Meyer