

How Holy Spirit Is Breaking the Chains of America's Opioid Crisis Victims

Every day, nearly 200 Americans die from a drug overdose. Millions more across the nation are unable to find freedom from addiction. In October 2017, President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency. But Gary Blackard, president and CEO of Adult and Teen Challenge, says the opioid crisis is not a political problem; it's a spiritual one. He believes this addiction is fueled by spiritual warfare.

"We believe Satan is directing this epidemic, using it as a way to kill people and destroy families," Blackard says. "Every day, we see stories about parents being separated from their children, imprisoned for their drug use or imprisoned for the crimes they committed because of their addiction. This scene is at the forefront of not only the United States, but around the world, and it's a very, very spiritual battle. If you don't fight it spiritually, you miss that opportunity to really see Christ transforming lives."

Though some believe addiction could never affect them or their loved ones, for many believers, it already has. In a recent online survey conducted by Charisma Media, 84% of respondents said they or someone they know has been addicted to drugs. Drug addiction affects every race, class and religion without discrimination—and it's only growing worse.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that from 1999 to 2017, more than 700,000 people died of a drug overdose. Of the 70,200 drug overdose deaths in 2017, around 68% overdosed on an opioid. That number is six times higher than in 1999.

So how can Spirit-filled believers push back and shift the atmosphere in America? *Charisma* spoke with multiple sources—from addicts to parents to professionals—about the spiritual side of this national crisis for the Charisma News Podcast's "Addicted" series (available now on). Their stories, presented one by one, offer definitive proof that the Holy Spirit is still in the miracle-working business.

Angel Colon

When Angel Colon woke up from a cocaine-induced blackout, his face was covered in blood. His bedroom appeared ransacked. Furniture was tossed upside down. When he asked his roommates what happened, no one knew.

But Colon did.

"What I didn't tell my roommates at that moment was that I had a lot of nights where I had spiritual warfare," Colon says. "There were a lot of nights where I fought with demons. ... I would wake up at night [and] I would literally hear demonic voices, and I'd fight with them, but even though I was in the world, I would rebuke them. I would pray, and they would go away."

Colon made international headlines when he was one of 49 people wounded in the Pulse nightclub massacre in 2016. Most people know his story because the Lord set him free from homosexuality. But Colon says he rarely gets to share about freedom from another addiction—hardcore drugs.

Colon first turned to drugs when his father, a pastor, had an affair.

"I thought if my dad did this and he was a man of God, then I could live the way I wanted to," Colon says. "That's when I turned into an alcoholic."

From drinking, he turned to ecstasy, cocaine and poppers, a

euphoria-inducing drug that leads to intense muscle relaxation.

“I would hear voices every time I went into a club or a party,” Colon says. “They would tell me I didn’t belong here. It was the Holy Spirit, and I would take a few more bumps of cocaine to drown out the voice.”

Still, he denied he had an addiction—until the night he believes he wrestled with a demon. That’s when he invoked the faith of his youth and commanded the demons to leave in the name of Jesus. But the experience shook him to his core.

“After that moment, I realized I had a serious problem,” Colon says. “And I realized the enemy wanted to take me out.”

Colon was desperate to break the addiction, so he prayed one of the most dangerous prayers of his life.

“I told God to do whatever [He needed to do] to bring me back to Him,” Colon says.

He prayed that prayer in 2015, about a year before he was shot approximately six times by a gunman at Pulse. Incredibly, Colon says the shooting actually saved his life. Because of his blood loss, he received a transfusion that saved him from going through painful withdrawals from the cocaine.

Colon says he is now completely clean, despite the repercussions of the shooting.

“I wake up every morning and see my scars, and it just gives me a chance to say, ‘Thank you, Lord,’ because not everyone has this chance,” he says. “There are others who gave their whole lives and are not here today, so I want to give everything I have to God. He is worthy of it all—all my praise. Everything I do is for Him and nobody else.”

Colon’s powerful testimony is something to celebrate.

By the grace of God, he never experienced an overdose, but other Christian families have to hold fast to their faith when addiction steals the life of their loved ones.

Robyn Korn

Robyn Korn's teenage son, Tim, died of a heroin overdose in 2010.

"He was one of the first [overdose deaths] before the heroin epidemic became really big," Korn says. "He was on the beginning wave of the heroin epidemic in Shelby County, Alabama."

By the church's standards, Korn did everything right. She raised her two sons in church. They attended Sunday school and youth group. Tim was even baptized at a conference hosted by a Spirit-filled church. He was also actively involved in Boy Scouts. Still, the addiction took root.

Korn says she believes two main factors contributed to Tim's addiction. First, the Korn family had relocated from overseas when Tim was in middle school. The only friends he could find were alcoholics and peers who smoked pot on a regular basis. Second, Korn's husband left the family when Tim was just 15.

"To go from a two-family income to a single-mom income impacted Tim's perspective," Korn says. "He was used to being able to have many things, and we really had to cut back. Plus, he went from having an active dad in his life to somebody who was no longer around at all. I think that created a lot of pain."

Tim went from drinking to marijuana to pills to heroin. But Korn kept fighting for her son's life and future with the help of the church.

"I never realized how much I was on my knees before God lifting Tim up, asking for help with him," Korn says. "Every

Sunday, I was up front getting prayer, and I wasn't ashamed to do that. I knew I needed God's help."

Church elders connected Tim to counseling services and even tried interventions on multiple occasions. Korn says many men in the church stepped in as father figures, taking her sons to monster truck rallies and other activities. The women of the church surrounded Korn with love, support and comfort, even on her darkest days.

"It was my 50th birthday, and Tim ended up going to juvenile detention center that night, but there was a group of women who took me out just to celebrate [my birthday] with me," Korn says. "I knew I wasn't alone, and I wasn't the only one trying to muddle through this."

People from the church met Korn at the hospital when Tim overdosed but didn't die. They also were the first people on the scene after paramedics when addiction ultimately took Tim's life.

Korn believes that it's this effort that allowed Tim to return to God in the months just before his death.

"He realized he needed God's help in trying to get out of this addiction process, and he would ask people for prayer," Korn says.

Six weeks before Tim's death, he was arrested for drug-related charges and sent to jail. While behind bars, he wrote a letter to his mother saying he was ready to be clean.

"He had hit rock bottom for a while, but I think adult jail really opened his eyes to what he wanted to do with his life," Korn says. "... He said the problem with addiction is that when you can stop, you don't want to, and when you want to stop, you can't. While Tim recognized he was an addict, he was very careful to prevent others from going down that path."

Korn says after his death, many people told her stories of how he tried to protect others from addiction. And even in Tim's death, Korn still saw the grace and mercy of the Lord. Two people accepted Christ after Tim's death, including his girlfriend. She was baptized in the very church Tim was raised in.

Today Korn uses Tim's death to minister to other families devastated by addiction.

"There is hope, and God can walk you through it," Korn says. "The one thing I have found in Tim's death is that I don't know where I'd be if it weren't for the grace of God. A loss like this is so devastating, but much more so if you don't have the hope and grace of God to support you through it."

Jenna Winston

Jenna Winston was angry to be alive. After doctors pumped 87 oxycontin out of her stomach, she woke to realize her suicide attempt had failed. That's when Winston says a beautiful woman named Rachel came into her hospital room.

"It was like 2:30 a.m., and it looked like a bad '80s horror movie, because I'm in a hospital gown and on a gurney in the corner, and there's really bad lighting," Winston says. "She comes in and closes the door behind her and says, 'I'm not supposed to do this. I could lose my job, but God's been telling me for two hours to come in here and tell you that He loves you, and if you look up, He's going to pull you out of this.'"

Winston cursed God, but something inside her broke.

"I just started weeping uncontrollably," Winston says. "I started opening up about all of this stuff that had been stuffed inside for so long. In that moment, everything changed. Within a couple of weeks, through the most supernatural chain of events, I ended up in faith-based

recovery.”

Once a raging addict who would fake tooth pain to get narcotics, Winston now runs Heartscaping, a prophetic deliverance ministry that helps heal the root of pain and addiction.

“Most people focus on their behaviors and what they do wrong,” Winston says of working with addicts and traumatized victims. “But my passion is getting to the roots behind what got them there in the first place, because when you can get those roots ripped out and loose the perfect love of heaven—the perfect love of Jesus—those behaviors fall off on their own.”

Winston says much of addiction is rooted in fear and lies.

“When people hear the word ‘deliverance,’ they think it’s like, ‘Come out, you evil spirit,’ but deliverance can be as simple as exchanging a lie for asking God what His truth is about me,” Winston says. “Sometimes, we need to let His truth be louder than the lies, and that brings so much deliverance.”

Winston knows this firsthand.

“I grew up in a home where I dealt with all kinds of abuses and traumas, at the same time as going to church and saying we loved each other,” Winston says.

By 18, she was married. At 19, she had her son. When she turned 28, she began to suspect her husband of cheating, which triggered suppressed memories.

“All the traumas I suffered and all the memories were popping up,” Winston says. “I became crazy with neurotic anxiety and ended [up] in the psych ward a few times for meltdowns where I took a lot of psych meds.”

That’s where she discovered her penchant for opiate-based pain pills.

"They made all my pain and anxiety go away, and I felt like Superwoman," she says. "It was like a lightbulb switch, and I became an addict overnight."

Winston says she was a functioning addict for years. She held a job while popping pills on the side.

"Slowly but surely, I lost it all," Winston says. "I went from beautiful homes and cars and functioning with a job to having my teeth pulled for drugs."

That's when she attempted suicide with the 87 oxycontin. Shortly after the failed attempt, Winston found herself in a faith-based recovery program. Still, she smuggled in weeks' worth of drugs, fearing the detox would kill her.

One morning, everything changed.

"I said out loud, 'God, I'm done picking and choosing which parts of me You can have,'" Winston says. "I took all the meds over to the main house [of the rehabilitation center], and we flushed them down the garbage disposal."

That was her natural deliverance. And two weeks later, she experienced her supernatural deliverance.

"Jesus was going into that darkness, and it had to leave," Winston says. "I had this moment where I just started screaming, and all the rage and anger inside me came out. I screamed forever. I remember falling out in my bed spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted. And Jesus crawled in that bed with me and just started to play with my hair. He goes, 'I am so sorry for the things that happened to you that made you not want to feel. And if you trust Me, I'm going to make every day of your life better than any day that you ever lived.'"

She surrendered everything to Him and now works with addicts as well as people who suffer from anxiety, depression and

other emotional disorders.

"My favorite thing in the world is seeing people get freedom," Winston says. "Everything the Lord has set me free from, from rape to trauma to addiction to infidelities—from everything you can imagine, we can carry breakthrough."

Caleb McCall

Caleb McCall was 13 years old the first time police arrested him for drug possession. What started with pot quickly evolved into snorting cocaine before junior high basketball games.

"My parents had an idea some things were going on, but they didn't understand how bad it really was," McCall says.

McCall was dealing the same cocaine he smoked and turned to methamphetamines as a freshman in high school. The drugs didn't impede much on his athletic performance, and colleges began scouting him for basketball.

But at 18, he got his girlfriend pregnant.

"I turned down all the [college] offers and said I was going to work," McCall says. "But keep in mind, I was a drug dealer. It was all I knew."

McCall would pick up a job every few months to keep the police off his back, but drugs remained his consistent source of income.

"At 18, I'm a kid trying to raise a kid, just a drug dealer who has become addicted throughout my years of dealing and using drugs," McCall says. "I always had them, and I was taking them as I was selling them."

McCall said he wasn't an intimidating presence at the time, which made him a target. His 6-foot-5 frame carried maybe 100 pounds.

"I wasn't a violent person," McCall says. "I was always soft-spoken and never really liked fighting. Word got out about this skinny kid who has all these drugs, all this money, and these other people who'd been dealing drugs were more violent. They began to hear about his, and two robberies changed the trajectory of where my life was heading for the next six years."

The first occurred in a Walmart parking lot.

"They held a .45 caliber pistol to my chest and told me to give them the drugs," McCall says. "My pregnant girlfriend was in the vehicle at this time, and they took all the drugs and robbed me."

McCall didn't retaliate, so other dealers jumped him in an apartment complex a few weeks later.

This time McCall changed his approach. He started injecting steroids to bulk up.

"I got really big really quick—I mean, really quick," McCall says. "I started lifting weights, and the violence began coming out of me. My mentality changed."

Now McCall was the one behind the gun, conducting robberies of his own. From age 19 to 26, he lived a life of crime and addiction. But he also began hearing the voice of the Lord.

At age 24, McCall says he went into church the morning after a bar fight. He was on crutches, and hobbled through the church doors after the service and shook the pastor's hand.

"As we were leaving, he stopped me and said, 'Man, let's grab some lunch sometime,'" McCall says. "And I'm sitting there thinking, 'Does this dude even know who I am?' A lot of people in the church knew I was the biggest drug dealer in the area. But sure, yeah, let's go to lunch."

McCall says the pastor really began to minister to him and

offered him odd jobs at the church. The church became his haven.

"The reason why I went to church is I knew that the only way my life would change was if somehow God intervened and had mercy on me and changed my life," he says.

As McCall began to paint walls, the pastor introduced him to an audio clip of Todd White's testimony, detailing how God set the evangelist free from a life of drugs.

"I walked around the corner of the church and broke down crying," McCall says. "Me! This big, violent, angry, mad drug dealer. But God was speaking to me through him. And I told God, 'God, if You'll do it for that man, You'll do it for me.' And there was a breakthrough that happened in my spirit."

McCall says he spent the next six months living in hypocrisy, working at church but selling drugs on the side. When McCall got into more trouble, the pastor recommended a Teen Challenge program.

"When I got to the program, I realized Jesus is way more than I thought," McCall says. "It's so much better to actually live for Him, to have a relationship with Him, and not just go through the motions."

McCall says he devoured the Bible, renewed his mind and felt a fresh call to ministry: "When I went to Teen Challenge, they taught me how to be a man, how to get up, go to work, do your devotions and spend time with the Lord."

He now leads a program similar to Teen Challenge called Be the Bush Ministries in Middle Tennessee.

"We teach them Christ and disciple them," McCall says.

It's testimonies like McCall's that really make a difference in the lives of addicts today.

Courage to Change

Breaking addiction is not just a physical or mental issue. Instead, it's often a supernatural occurrence led by the Holy Spirit. And without the Holy Spirit, taking down addiction seems impossible.

Ann White, founder of Courage for Life, has developed a method that helps addicts recover while reminding them of what's most important. She often ministers in prisons, where she preaches, teaches and encourages them to embrace God's Word and His peace that comes with it. White's own story, one of alcohol addiction, gives her a relatable platform when she ministers.

"It breaks down walls," White says. "When you begin to share your testimony—and it's the same way in churches, support groups or any place we are seeking help—we're encouraging other people in their walk with the Lord with hope and healing. That transparency is critical. As I begin to share my story, and my ministry team shares their personal stories, these gals can relate to our walks with insecurity, our walks with shame and self-condemnation, walks with mistakes and codependency. ... Pain recognizes pain, and these gals begin to connect."

White depends on the acronym "COURAGE" to preach the truth about recovery from any addiction or emotional bondage. "C" means to commit to change.

"We have to ask ourselves, 'What does God want me to change?'" she says. "I need to make a commitment that I'm going to do this—and it's not going to go out the window like our New Year's resolutions, because we're going to follow it up with six more steps."

"O" stands for overcoming obstacles: "When God is calling us to make a necessary change in our lives, we are going to look at what stands in our way. Is it other people? Our own issues? Codependency? Our attitude? Satan is going to be attacking us

at every turn, but we need to be prepared.”

The third step, “U,” is about uncovering your real self.

“It’s not who the world says we are, but who God says we are,” White says. “He is with us at every step and every turn to give us everything we need. When He calls us to do something, He is going to equip us to do it.”

The “R” step allows someone to replace worldly lies with scriptural truth. This step has been instrumental in White’s own life and ministry.

“Now when Satan tries to interject a lie into my life, I can say, ‘I reject that lie in the name of Jesus because the truth is...,’ and then I can recite the Scripture related to that,” White says. “When you practice it, when you put God’s Word in, it’s going to come right back out. When we put God’s Word in, we begin to grow stronger and more courageous in a positive way.”

“A” means to accept the things we cannot change.

“I can’t change someone else,” White says. “I can’t fix my husband or my kids, but the one person I can change is myself. And with God’s help, I can see that He’s trying to change me, but I need to put that other person in God’s hands and pray for that person.”

“G” is to grasp God’s love for you.

“Satan wants to keep on perpetuating the lie that you aren’t worthy,” White says. “But no, we must grasp God’s true love for us, how He died on the cross, He gave His life, He shed His blood because He knew we could not do it on our own. We must really get in touch with God’s love.”

And finally, “E” is to embrace a life of grace.

“We’ve got to have grace for others, so we receive God’s grace

for ourselves,” White says. “This can be quite difficult and very challenging if you’ve been wounded. But if you begin to look at the other person as a flawed human, a sinner in need of a Savior, ... it helps us to forgive other people when we understand what their background is.”

White’s faith-driven formula may be a difficult prescription to follow, but the results allow for addicts of any kind to find the freedom they crave delivered by the cross.

But no matter what method is employed for freedom, the only solution to a problem this big must come from heaven.

“This is an epidemic of unprecedented proportions,” Blackard says. “There are 20 million substance abuse users in the United States, 12 million with opioids. Every seven minutes, someone dies from a drug overdose. ... We’ve got a serious problem that if we don’t address the whole person, including their spiritual life and their soul, we’re missing a huge opportunity.”

Ultimately, Blackard believes Spirit-filled Christians are uniquely positioned to help those caught up in addiction. That’s because they can introduce addicts to true freedom through a relationship with the greatest chain-breaker of all.

“Christ is the transformer of all our lives, and He alone transforms addiction,” Blackard says. “...The Holy Spirit is very core to what we do, because we believe that, day in and day out, the Holy Spirit is the one that brings conviction, that brings refreshing and wisdom to our lives. The Holy Spirit engages and interacts with us on a day-to-day basis. So if you’re an addict needing that support and structure, the Holy Spirit is the first person to work with.” {eo}

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Jessilyn Lancaster is the managing editor of Movieguide®..

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