

Sample Chapters

Praise for *The Face of Homelessness*

In our society, homeless people seem to be inconvenient reminders of rips in the fabric of the American Dream. They are often ignored as people too ill, too drunk or too lazy to work and provide for themselves or their families. Reynolds reminds us of the innate value of every human being, and that we all share common aspirations when it comes to defining a purpose in life and having a place to call home.

Michael Stoops
Acting Executive Director
National Coalition for the Homeless

WWJD? Its easy in church, tough when walking by the homeless. Jeremy Reynolds has the guts to begin with his own story, and then passionately introduces us to stories of real Christianity in action. WWJD? Read and find out. Jeremy will take you where following Christ is more than a cliché. Buy it if you have the cash – follow if you have the guts.

Dan Cooley, Senior Pastor
Cottonwood Church,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

To say from the comfort of our own homes that the plight of the homeless is not our own negates the alarming fact that it *can* happen to anyone. Jeremy's story proves this to be true. And proves it can be overcome. We support Jeremy on his tremendous journey, and support the work of his tireless organization, Joy Junction.

Rabbi Jonathan Aaron and
Michelle Azar Aaron
Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills

Jeremy Reynolds, whose career has centered on reaching out to people whom we seldom have occasion to meet, is an experienced minister to the homeless in America. He has touchingly shared their stories with us in this readable and moving account drawing on his understanding of this persistent problem in America.

Don Douglas, Ph.D.
Biola University
School of Intercultural Studies

This is a fascinating book. The stories portray the real issues of homelessness with names and faces that compel action by both the secular and faith communities. Housing and services go together hand-in-hand or we all suffer.

Herb Smith
President/CEO
Los Angeles Mission

Provocative and knowledgeable, Jeremy Reynolds speaks from years of experience in serving the homeless population in a practical, sensible and compassionate manner. His yearning and passion leaps from the pages, grips your heart and motivates you to get in the game and join him in this immense battle that must be fought by all of us! This is a 'must read' for anyone with a heart for serving others. Open your mind and be challenged. Otherwise, stay on the sidelines and let life pass you by through your inaction!

Ron Bishop
President/CEO
SCORE International Ministry

Jeremy Reynolds knows the terrain—the world of the homeless—and loves those who live there. These stories remind us all that Jesus, through people like Jeremy, still sees and reaches out to those who most of us overlook. This book confronts us with the question, “Will we join Him?”

Jim Sandberg, Senior Pastor
Tabor Baptist Church
Muncie, Indiana

The Face of Homelessness

Jeremy Reynolds, Ph.D.

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Alan's Story: A Slap in the Face

"With tears in my eyes, a broken soul, and nowhere else to turn, I dropped to my knees, bowed my head and I finally confessed to God that I could no longer live my life without His help." That was the moment recovery began for a man named Alan.

His downfall began about 15 years before, when he started using cocaine and heroin. He said, "Like most others in the beginning I was convinced I could keep my drug use separate from the other parts of my life. And like everyone else, I was wrong."

Alan said that for the next 13 years, despite stints in both jail and prison, he refused to believe that his drug use played any part in his troubled life.

He said, "My troubles never directly involved drugs or the possession of them. But, of course, I was only lying to myself because I was either high or trying to get money to get high when I got caught."

Alan said it was only during the last 18 months he has come to realize his addictions were out of control almost from the beginning, and were the core reasons for the troubles that plagued him.

Alan also came to another realization—his drug addiction had deeply affected the only person he had ever loved, his wife Rachel.

Alan said, "Our lives had become so focused on our addic-

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tion that it began destroying everything else around us. We no longer had any real friends who cared about us or our situation, and we'd pretty much alienated ourselves from all our family in hopes that they wouldn't find out about our drug use."

For the Love of a Woman

But that was to change. A few months ago Alan said he awoke one morning to find his wife sitting in the chair next to their bed, sobbing bitterly. He said that instead of just assuming she was sick and needed her morning fix, he asked her what was wrong.

Alan said that her answer was like a slap in the face— took him completely by surprise.

"With tears in her eyes and a very shaky voice, she looked at me and said, 'I don't want to live like this anymore. I can't live like this anymore! It's destroying me, and all I want to do is go somewhere and kill myself.'"

Alan said it was at that point he believes God had allowed him to look directly into his wife's soul.

He said, "And what I saw was me, killing the only person I had ever loved and who had ever loved me. I had used her love for me to get her addicted to the same kind of drugs I was already addicted to. In doing so, I had allowed that addiction to destroy her just as it had destroyed me years ago; mentally, emotionally, physically, and most of all spiritually."

Alan said that he and Rachel hugged and cried and he promised her that he would do whatever it took to get them both off drugs. For the first time in his life, Alan realized he was scared. Even though he had lost things like girls, money, and even his freedom on and off throughout his life, none of these things mattered much to him. But he didn't want to lose Rachel.

"I realized that if I didn't do something about our addiction, that if I didn't keep my promise and get both of us off drugs, that I would lose the only person who meant more to me than life itself."

Alan's Story: A Slap in the Face

Initially, Alan thought he and Rachel could get off drugs without a program. And so for the first few weeks, that's what they did. But they'd last only a couple of days and then get more drugs, telling each other it was just to take the edge off. "But the truth was, neither of us had the will power to just say no," Alan said.

Then, at about 3 a.m. one morning, Alan woke up and looked at his wife sleeping next to him. Alan said she appeared restless and sad, even while she was sleeping.

He said, "Out of nowhere, or perhaps somewhere deep inside me, the flood gates opened and I began weeping. The tears flowed so hard and uncontrollably that I had to get out of bed because I didn't want Rachel to wake up."

Alan Turns His Life Over to Jesus

Alan felt lost, defeated, and scared; he knew it was time to do something that he had never done before.

"With tears in my eyes, a broken soul, and nowhere else to turn, I dropped to my knees, bowed my head and I finally confessed to God that I could no longer live my life without His help," Alan said. "I made a promise to God to put Him before anything or anyone else and all I asked in return was that He take away my wife's pain, sadness, and addiction by whatever means He felt was necessary. If that meant taking her away from me in order for her to get better, then I'd accept it because I loved her that much."

Just as quickly as the tears came, they were gone. He felt as if a huge weight had been lifted off him. It was at that point he began to think about Joy Junction. It was still the middle of the night, so Alan got off his knees, walked back into his bedroom, and fell straight to sleep.

When Alan woke up in the morning, he said he was still thinking about Joy Junction. He and his wife made their way over to the shelter; they both decided signing up for the shelter's life recovery program would be a good idea.

Alan said this decision turned out to be the best one he ever made.

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"For once I listened to God, and it changed my life," Alan said. "The Lord kept the extreme pain and discomfort away, as well as the intense cravings that normally go along with an addiction such as mine. I believe that if I continue to believe, listen, and do what God wants me to do, that He will continue to stand beside me, help me, and keep me clean and sober the rest of my life."

Rachel has had to leave both Joy Junction and the life recovery program to deal with some medical issues; Alan is praying that in the months to come, the two of them will be reunited.

"I'm already a true believer and the Lord knows what I need in life," Alan said "As long as I keep my promise and continue to put Him first, He will meet my needs each new day."

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Kim's Story

It's easy to condemn someone for drinking to excess or being an alcoholic when you've never walked a mile in his or her shoes. Maybe after reading Kim's story you'll understand a little more about what can, quite literally, drive a person to drink.

In a recent interview, Kim told me her mother was murdered when she was 20, so she drank to numb her grief. Her brother was murdered when she was 25, so that gave her another excuse to drink. Although Kim was married and described herself as a "pampered, spoiled housewife," she said her husband worked all the time, mostly in other states, so she drank to ease the loneliness.

Spiraling Out of Control

Then Kim's life took a nosedive. In 2005, after being married for 18 years, she said her husband stopped sending money home and disappeared, giving her yet another excuse to turn to alcohol.

Kim said, "I didn't do what any normal person would have done in this situation, like getting a job. I drank, got high, and felt sorry for myself."

Nine months later, after she had run out of friends to stay with, she sold her car and went to stay with her aunt and uncle, all the while continuing to drink. It took Kim six months to get a job, and when she finally did, she only worked enough

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to buy booze, not enough to get her own place. After eight months of living with her uncle and aunt, they kicked Kim out.

Her aunt and uncle did give her \$650 and a one-way ticket to Albuquerque, where her niece lived. However, after staying with her niece for a week, Kim was again asked to leave.

"I went to a motel for two weeks and stayed drunk until I was broke," Kim said. "Then reality hit! I had three days left in my motel room; no money, no booze, no food, no cigarettes, and no job. What was I going to do? I remember crying and begging God to help me. I don't know why, but I got out the phone book and looked under homeless shelters. That's how I found Joy Junction."

The Road to Recovery

Kim came to Joy Junction on Sept. 9, 2006. She said, "I spent the next few days trying to figure out how to get out of this mess I was in, and blaming everyone who I felt had let me down. I started to realize that drinking wasn't helping my situation and I decided that I should at least quit drinking until I got back on my feet. I still didn't think it was my fault I was homeless, but by this time, I knew I couldn't count on anyone bailing me out, so I decided to join Joy Junction's life recovery program."

The life recovery program is a six-month intensive faith-based course with classes, work assignments, Bible study and church services.

Looking back, her initial motivation for joining the program was not the best. She said she thought that the \$25 weekly gift that Joy Junction gives to people who successfully complete the weekly program requirements sounded pretty good.

She said, "I could at least buy cigarettes and have bus fare to go look for a job. I was pretty upset when I found out I wasn't going to be allowed to work an outside job while I was in the program, because I still thought money would solve all my problems."

Kim said she didn't think her attitude changed until she

Kim's Story

had been in the program for about two months.

She said, "I was taken out of the office job I liked, and moved to another job. I was angry, got a curfew extension, went to spend the night (out), and got drunk. The next day when I got back to Joy Junction, no one knew I had even been drinking. But I knew, and it bothered me."

It was at this point Kim realized something significant; she had a drinking problem and for the first time in 20 years she had found something that was helping her feel good about herself.

A New Direction

"This was a turning point in my program," Kim said. "I started really paying attention in class, not just filling a seat. I also realized that when I was crying and saying 'God help me' in that motel room, He was listening, and Joy Junction was His answer."

Since then she has come to realize that the anger she felt when she arrived to Joy Junction was misdirected. "I was mad at my husband for leaving, my family for not taking me in, my mother and brother for being dead, and the people who killed them for taking them away from me."

She added, "I was angry at God for every bad thing that had ever happened to me."

Kim said she finally had to admit to herself that it was the choices she made that put her where she was.

"I chose to drink for 22 years," she said. "I chose to stay home and be a housewife for 18 years. I chose to not get a job when my husband left. I chose to sponge off my aunt and uncle when I lived with them. I chose to stay drunk for three weeks, instead of getting a job when I moved to Albuquerque. I was responsible for all the choices I made, no matter how much I wanted to be able to blame them on others. And the person I was really angry at was myself, for not making the right choices."

However, Kim is gradually letting go of all of the old anger.

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"I have even reached a point where I can forgive my stepfather for killing my mother, and my brother's girlfriend for killing him. I even pray for them. I still have anger issues, but I'm working on them. I still catch myself slipping into denial once in a while, but I'm working on that too. I'm learning how to let God show me what path to take, instead of trying to go my own way. I don't always remember to do things God's way, and it's always a disaster when I slip up, but I'm getting better at it."

And most importantly, Kim now has a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, which she never had prior to joining Joy Junction.

"Before, I only prayed when I was in trouble," she said. "Now I try to pray at least once a day, and when things are going bad, I often stop and pray for the strength or patience to deal with things. I think that of all the things I've gotten out of the program, a personal relationship with God has been the most important."