

# God's Call to Welcome and Embrace The Addicted

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**The Addicted is one of CityServe's 10 initiatives--compassion templates addressed in scripture for how the church can engage and help those who are hurting.** Drug addiction is killing people just like you and me: fellow image bearers of God who are moms, dads, uncles, aunts, daughters, and sons. From February 2018 to February 2019 alone, 69,000 people died of drug overdoses. This problem has grown markedly worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Months of isolation have left people without support. **In March 2020, the number of drug related deaths increased by 18%. In April, by 29% and by May 2020 a staggering 42%.**

What would Jesus say about a perspective that seems antithetical to the core tenants of the faith?

During a recent discussion with Louie Wright, CEO of One Door Recovery, Louie wondered whether the church would have been ready to accept those who died during the pandemic, had they found their way onto a pew before succumbing to addiction. The question is legitimate given the perspective some Christians hold about issues like drug abuse. An attitude that whispers, "Why can't they just stop using?" isn't uncommon.

Perhaps a bigger question is: what would Jesus say about a perspective that seems antithetical to the core tenants of the faith? It's clear from scripture that Jesus himself was sinless, yet He served and healed with an abundance of compassion. Ultimately, He went to the cross and died for sins he never committed.

As Christians, we serve a God who's well acquainted with the messy sins that we often shield our eyes from and asks us to love anyway. Louie implores us to do the same; especially for brothers and sisters who enter our churches looking as bad as they feel. "These are people who desperately need a church community," he said. "These are people that are dying. What if every single one of those people showed up at our church? Would we know how to love them the way they need to be loved? Can we see them the way God sees them?"



Louie and Jarris Wright, co-founders of One Door Recovery

## Seeing and Serving Your Neighbor

Louie Wright posed these questions as someone with the experience and authority to do so. He's seen the horrors of drug addiction up close and from multiple sides. Before Louie was miraculously offered a chance at sobriety in 2012, a heroin addiction stole his home, his wife, and his kids. If not for the compassion of a good Samaritan, he would never have been able to afford the medical rehabilitation that cost anywhere from \$20,000 to \$30,000. A man who was not a Christian at the time, but was friends with one of Louie's friends, gifted him entry into the program. Because of that compassion Louie detoxed his body in 7 days and went on to discover a new life in Jesus.

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Fortunately, Louie's journey led him back to his wife, kids, and his own ministry: One Door Recovery, a medical detox program that helps men and women just like him find sobriety and faith. Often this happens on scholarship, free of charge to the man or woman seeking help.

One Door clients are often hesitant about the program's encouragement towards a faith community, pointing to instances of rejection due to their appearance. Even more common is a feeling of unworthiness that keeps them from entering a church full of "perfect people."

While church is never required, Louie knows fellowship is an essential step in recovery and a supportive faith community is a matter of life or death.

## **Community, Transparency and Education in the Church**

**The idea that there are hurting people that feel hesitant or afraid to walk through church doors should cause us significant alarm.**

"Creating a safe environment is so important," said Louie. "Not cosigning negative behavior, but giving people grace to grow. And allowing the Holy Spirit to convict. Our job is just to speak truth and love people... and allow God to be the judge and Jesus to save."

At Canyon Hills, One Door's partner church, welcoming and caring for the broken is part of the church's DNA. The message from the pulpit is one of acceptance without the expectation of "good, Christian behavior" first. The mission is to love well and allow the Holy Spirit to work transformation within the individual. This class of church leadership is found across the country.

Grand Rapids First Assembly of God, who most recently launched [CityServe Michigan](#), has been serving the addicted for seven years in the well-known ministry: Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered 12-step recovery program for anyone struggling with hurt, pain or any kind of addiction. Kerry Watts, Associate Pastor of Discipleship, expressed how vital community is to those who battle addictions. "Everyone needs someone in their life that knows their junk but loves them anyway." As Watts explains, the addicted have internal struggles they can't unpack at a Sunday church service. They are more likely to be vulnerable at a different setting with people who have been where they are.

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This transparent mission put forth from church leadership is essential if God's people hope to make an impact on the drug addicted. Perhaps more profound is the far-reaching impact drug addiction has on the issues of foster care, poverty, homelessness, exploitation, mental health, and imprisonments. The fewer addicted adults, the more kids that get to stay with their families of origin, the more secure households, and the more stable our communities. One of CityServe's goals is to understand and focus our initiatives on these often-connected issues that plague our communities.

As Christians, we know experiencing the Lord's love and kindness is what leads to repentance. So, what keeps us from showing kindness and sharing rich community with all those who walk through our doors?



Often, the answer is a lack of understanding. Most Christians are sincere in their desire to love well, but if we've never experienced addiction or been exposed to it in our families, naivete can impact our understanding. We wonder why people can't "just quit?" This question reveals a false perception, not simple callousness. To remove the stigma on this issue, education and training are key. Learning how to best serve those dealing with substance abuse from someone who has experienced addiction firsthand is vital to a well-executed care plan.

## Embracing One Another

For Louie, being embraced by his church community long before he understood how to be a Christian husband or father was a clear example of God's love. It's that kind of love that everyone trying to fight their way out of the grip of addiction needs in order to recover. The body of Christ operates best as a family who cares for one another. When this happens, parents find jobs, kids are cared for, and the church experiences the riches of having a wide array of gifts and talents serving within their communities.

**How is your church sharing God's love with the messy and imperfect? Will your church be a part of the solution?**

