




# Victory Foundation

7012 Ogden Road SE  
Building a heart in the heart of Calgary



**Pastor  
Don Delaney**

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## VESSELS OF OPPORTUNITY

When I first met Joe, he looked like he hadn't slept for days and was nursing a severe hang over. His head was down, but he lifted it slightly and tried to smile as he was introduced to me in the parking lot of our building in Ogden. The man that introduced him was his boss who confided in me that Joe had always been one of his best workers. He was concerned about Joe's alcohol use and told me he would have to let him go if something didn't change soon. After a short intake interview, Joe was accepted into our transitional housing program. He and his boss both left that day with optimistic smiles.

Joe has an estranged wife who also has her own struggles with addiction. Together they have a five year old boy named Joey. Joe would often share his guilt about not being a better father. Instead of letting that guilt drive him back to the bottle, this time he chose to make a change and break the addiction.

As soon as Joe moved in he began to take advantage of every opportunity available to get his life back on track. He signed up for the money management program to bring accountability to his finances, he attended the addiction groups to deal with his

drinking, and he even went to extra meetings in the community to make sure there was no room for the temptation of alcohol to get a foothold back into his life. On Sundays he would be at church with his son Joey who loved our Sunday School. On top of all this he maintained his full time job. Joe really worked at his recovery and spent many hours sharing his struggles with Frank our resident counsellor. Frank could see that Joe was sincere, honest and taking all the right steps concerning his recovery.

Now, after only four months, Joe has moved into his own place. His motivation has been the possibility of having his son on a full-time basis. His wife's addiction had become unmanageable and social services placed little Joey in foster care. If Joe got his own place and demonstrated stability, they would take his son out of foster care and put him back with his dad. Joe has taken advantage of all the help offered, but it was a comment he made to me a couple of weeks ago that showed me real change had taken place on the inside. He said; "It sure feels good to wake up in the morning with a clear conscience." The guilt was gone!

There is a story in the Bible about a widow who was so severely in debt that her

creditors were going to take her two sons and make them slaves. The widow immediately went to Elisha the prophet to plead for help. Elisha asked her what she had in her house to pay off the debt. She said; "Nothing but a jar of oil." Elisha then instructed her to go to all her friends and neighbors and borrow as many empty vessels as she could. After bringing them all home she was told to fill them from her one jar of oil. Miraculously, every vessel was filled. After selling the oil, she was able to pay off her creditors and live on the leftover money with her sons. One lesson learned from this story is that all the widow's friends and neighbors provided vessels of opportunity in order for her to maximize the little she had to give.

Many people come to us with a small jar of hope. It is their resolve to pour that hope into every vessel of opportunity that determines their success. From Joe's boss to all the individuals who were there for him to pour his hope into; I believe it is safe to say Joe maximized his vessels of opportunity. It has set him onto a more successful path of overcoming his addiction, restoring his home, and finding purpose and blessing for his life.





Pastor Tom Maxwell

*“It is not how you start the race called ‘life’, but how you finish that is important.”*

## FINISHING WELL

In the twenty-first chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus relates a parable about a man who has two sons. He goes to the first son and says; “Son, go and work today in the vineyard.” His son responds and says that he will **not** go, but later changes his mind and goes to do his fathers bidding. The father then goes to a second son and says the same thing. The second son responds that he will go but, changes his mind and ends up not going at all. After sharing this story, Jesus asks an important question; “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” The obvious answer is the first son. Although he was reluctant at first, he ended up giving in and doing what his father had requested. The point that Jesus was making through this parable is that it is not how you start, but how you finish that is important.

This parable holds a truth that can be applied to life in general. The truth is that **it is not how you start the race called ‘life’, but how you finish that is important.** Like the second son in the parable, good intentions are great, but mean nothing if we do not follow through. We are all guilty at some point with not following through with our “good intentions.” All of us have made mistakes and we all have our share of regrets; but in order to remain positive in life we need to learn to fix our focus forward to a better future; not backwards to lament the mistakes and hurts of the past.

With the work that we do in the inner-city of Calgary, we see many individuals who struggle with this very thing. They had good intentions when they were younger; but are now discouraged that life never turned out the way they had hoped. Some of their despair is self-inflicted and some has been inflicted on them by others.

Our encouragement to them is that they can still have a good ending even though they may have had a poor start. Until a person is able to close the chapter on the past (and forgive themselves and others) they are never able to move forward to a more fulfilling future.

Bruce is one person in particular who stands out to me when I think of this parable. Bruce grew up in a Christian home with a good influence from his parents. In his teen years he rebelled against everything he knew to be right and went down a hard path of crime, drugs and alcohol. Over the next decades Bruce experienced the hardness of life that comes to a person who is determined to do his own thing and break every law possible. By the time he was fifty, Bruce had spent over twenty years in prison for the different crimes he had been convicted of. He knew he didn’t have a life of accomplishments that he could be proud of. He could have easily given up on life and thought; “What is the point of even trying?” So many years seemed to have been wasted and he could never go back and undo the wrongs that he had done. Instead of giving up on life, Bruce decided to make the most of what he had left.

The proverbial prodigal son had finally returned home. He closed the book on his past and forgave himself and others for the hurts over the years. He set his focus forward and was determined to finish the race better than he had started. Remembering the things that his parents had taught him, he began to come to church on a regular basis and decided to put God back in the middle of his life. Since he has made this decision, his life has been much better. In the past six years, Bruce has had no more issues with the legal system. He is one of the most consistent and faithful attendees of the Victory Outreach Centre, and he has been instrumental in

helping this ministry get to where it is today.

When we helped Bruce get off the streets, we found a place for him at the Alyth Lodge in Ogden. It was through Bruce that we were introduced to the previous owner of the building and were eventually able to purchase it in August of 2007. Without the connection that came through Bruce, we would probably not be in Ogden today. Bruce was also instrumental in the starting of our financial management program (which has been one of our most successful programs to date). It all started six years ago by helping Bruce manage his finances so that he could pay his own way, stay off the streets, and have no need for other social handouts. Six years later, we have twenty-two people on the program and it is making a big difference to many individuals. Time and space hinder me from telling of all the success stories that have come from our financial management program. Suffice it to say that poor financial management is one of the biggest causes of homelessness. When a person begins to get some structure and discipline in this area, they begin to move from a place of survival to a place of stability and success. With money in the bank, more options begin to open up and a person begins to envision a brighter future.

God has a way of taking our messed up lives and turning them into something good. He takes our despair and gives us hope with a sense of purpose and destiny. Our hope for a better future happens when we make a conscious decision to put God in the center of everything we do. We have the privilege of seeing this miracle happen every day with many individuals who come through our programs.

# SHANNON'S STORY

*By Pastor Pat Dennis*

The life of an addict is harsh to say the least. Difficulty and pain bring an individual to such a path, but that experience is nothing compared to the harshness of the addicted life itself. Even the road to recovery, as rewarding as it can be, is neither smooth nor easy. It takes courage, determination, and for many, several attempts to walk on it. Shannon's testimony exemplifies the struggles an individual encounters on such a journey.

Shannon, born the youngest of five children, spent most of her life in Calgary. Her childhood was difficult. Her parents, both alcoholics, separated when she was very young. Her family struggled with poverty and she was continually exposed to alcoholism, chaos, and domestic violence. At age twelve, Shannon began running away to escape her home-life and consequently ended up in the Child Welfare system. At age fifteen, she moved in with a family friend and babysat while she attended school. By sixteen Shannon was pregnant with her first child. A year later she gave birth to her second child.

As a young single parent Shannon found a job at a local hospital. She began using cocaine both to party and to give herself energy during the day. Drug use was an easy pattern to fall into since all of her siblings used drugs regularly. Eventually she married one of her brother's friends. He was an intravenous (IV) drug user who was involved in crime to support his habit. During this relationship she was jailed for the first time for possession. Shortly after her marriage, Shannon and her family moved to Hundred Mile House where she began an eight year period of sobriety. During this time she gave birth to her third child. Although she was clean and sober, her husband continued IV drug use. Shannon left him, returned to Calgary and moved in with family members. Due to their drug use, she eventually began to use drugs again.

Shannon's husband soon followed her to Calgary and the family was reunited. However, due to his ongoing IV drug use and frequent overdoses, Shannon made a decision to end her marriage and filed for divorce. It was shortly after that time that Child Welfare stepped in and apprehended her youngest child due to

Shannon's crack cocaine use. She cooperated with Child Welfare and was working to have her child returned when she relapsed following surgery and her child was placed permanently with her paternal grandmother.

Shannon found a job as a camp cook up north. During a Christmas visit with her older daughter, she was re-connected with a male friend who became her common-law partner. They both began to deal marijuana and use crack cocaine. Quickly, life took a downward turn and their lives began to spiral out of control. Drug use, domestic violence, prostitution, arrests, crime, and homelessness became a regular part of her life. Occasionally, when her partner was incarcerated, she would experience short periods of sobriety and would find work. When he was out of jail, the old pattern of drug use with all its familiar consequences would begin again.

In 2005, while at court, Shannon ran into three individuals from Eastside Victory Outreach and began receiving supports through the church. Seeking a different lifestyle, Shannon was accepted into the Eastside's Women's House where she stayed for a short period of time. Due to frequent "run ins" with old drug associates, she relapsed and left the program. Returning to her common-law partner, Shannon's life took on the old familiar pattern and, in 2008, she found herself at the Mustard Seed shelter. She remained drug free for almost three months and worked temporary jobs. It was during that time she was diagnosed with CMT, a serious genetic neurological disorder. With the aid of the agency's staff, she found a residence in north-east Calgary and was hopeful that she and her partner could start a different life. However, it was not long before they relapsed and the house was filled with IV drug users. The home that initially offered so much promise had become a shooting gallery. Again, her life reverted back to the familiar old nightmare of crime, drugs and abuse.

Finally, after being arrested in August 2009, Shannon hit bottom. For the first time ever she considered suicide. Life looked hopeless. All she could see was "people getting hurt and hurting each other". She could not fix it or change it and she wanted out. In desperation, she contacted us and asked for help. That night she was taken to one of Eastside's treatment houses and the

next day to Renfrew Recovery Center. From there she moved into the women's house and attended treatment.

Although Shannon's life is not perfect, nor is it not without its struggles, she continues to move forward. When asked what is different, Shannon says that she has found hope, believes that there is a God, and is learning to have faith in Him. She sees ongoing changes in herself—in her honesty and in her ability to impact others in a positive way. She states that she has found incredible support and a sense of family through the Eastside Victory Outreach Centre.

Shannon knows that the road ahead will be long and she will need to be careful in order to guard her sobriety. She has discovered that she has to stay sober in order to help others. She has taken an active role in encouraging addicts in their recovery and bringing people (including her family) into the church so they can find help for their lives. Shannon says she now sees drugs, not as a solution, but as a dead end. As a result, she pursues positive solutions to her problems and involves herself in activities that promote sobriety. For Shannon this includes prayer, attending church, bible studies, recovery meetings, and counselling. She also volunteers daily at the church in order to stay busy and to give back what she has received. Shannon is learning from her mistakes and is making tough life changes in order to keep from falling back into old patterns with the same old people.

As one can see from reading her story, the life of an addict is painful and fraught with many hardships and dangers. It is pain and difficulty that drives an addict to use; the life path itself is excruciating; and recovery an uphill climb. The good news is that hope is available. It comes through following a spiritual path, finding positive supports, and developing personal honesty and diligence. Hope also comes by discovering God's persistent love - the kind of love found in I Corinthians chapter thirteen - love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things - the unfailing kind of love that waited patiently for Shannon to reach out and connect. It has been a blessing to see God's relentless love at work in and around Shannon's life. As a church family, we have the privilege of being a part of God's heart and hand extended to those broken and hurting.

# Special Thanks & Contact Information

## **Victory Outreach Centre thanks:**

*Dryco  
NRG Insulation  
D & B Lumber  
Enerpro Electric  
Bartle & Gibson  
California Homes  
Tage Davidson (Drywall)*

## **Eastside Victory Outreach Centre thanks:**

*Springbank Community Church  
Jesus Loves You Society  
Ranaghan Foundation  
Associated Grocers  
All of our wonderful volunteers*

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**Editor: Tom Maxwell**

**Editorial Board:**

**Don Delaney, Vic Lappa, Pat Dennis,  
Design & Layout: Louise Maxwell**



BUILDING A HEART IN  
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**A Publication of:**

**The Victory Foundation**

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