



GATEWAY MISSION MINUTE

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GETTING FREE FROM A LIFESTYLE OF ADDICTION

LIFE CHALLENGES AND ADDICTIONS DEVASTATED JENICE— THEN SHE FOUND GATEWAY

A young mother whose life had been defined by chaos, Jenice had a problem with hard liquor.

When a West Michigan rehab center discharged her in January 2023, back to where she lived, Jenice recalls telling her father she was going to get something to eat. “Instead, I bought a fifth,” she said. “And then I bought another fifth. And another. I drank until I blacked out for two or three days.”

Waking up from that hangover, Jenice realized her years of self-medicating had led nowhere.

A Christian song came on the radio later that day, and Jenice recalls screaming at the top of her lungs: “*God, what happened? I used to go to church and sing in the choir and just lay in the pew and be happy. Where has all that gone?*” I realized I had thrown it all away.”

That prayer, and the steps she took afterward, proved pivotal in Jenice’s life. “From the day that I cried out to Jesus, I have never had a craving since.”

Ultimately, the Gateway Forge Program helped her get to the root of her problems and set a new trajectory in life. Those issues dated back over 16 years prior when she was a teenager.

Small-town desperation

Jenice grew up in a small Michigan town. After high school, she worked as assistant manager at Dollar Store and began a relationship with a boyfriend.

But anyone can fall prey to addictions. A one-pump

gas station opened up where she bought cigarettes and alcohol for the first time.

“I was getting drunk, falling down in the darkness,” said Jenice. “I experimented with other drugs and got hooked into that lifestyle.”

Still, Jenice had a semblance of family support and dreams of a stable life with the young man. But a string of devastating tragedies hit them.

First, her boyfriend’s dad took his own life, with Jenice and the young man facing the trauma of finding him. Afterwards, she and the boyfriend lived in his house for a while, until one day at work, Jenice got a call: their house was on fire. Flames engulfed the residence, and they had to find another place to live.

In the midst of these crises, Jenice found out she was pregnant. She abstained from alcohol during those nine months. Seeing her beautiful baby boy, Ashton, take his first breath was a light in the darkness for her.

Yet postpartum depression hit Jenice hard as the young family struggled to make ends meet with new expenses. When her son’s father left, Jenice was consumed with feelings of shame, worthlessness, and even suicidal thoughts.

“The voices inside my head only got worse,” she said. All of these crises led Jenice to that January day of being discharged from rehab and crying out to God.





MEETING WITH GOD ON THURSDAY NIGHTS

Since Gateway began, the morning devotional time has been a part of the rhythm of daily life for guests. Recently, the men's shelter reintroduced Encounter, a Thursday night service that was paused during COVID restrictions, which features an interactive teaching and worship time that presents the Gospel and Biblical principles.

"Encounter is designed as a vehicle to bring men the hope that they're seeking," said Gateway Mission's Spiritual Care Director, Travis Erdmann. "Our staff fosters an environment that proclaims God's love in a safe, welcoming way."

The Gateway team frequently invites local worship leaders to lead in song and pastors to share—but not every preacher is used to the rowdy environment. One leader recounted how a Gateway guest vocally disagreed with a recent speaker's point and a lively dialogue ensued.

Erdmann also notes that he has seen men not wanting to participate at the start of the services, their arms folded and some ready to leave. "But through the sharing of the Word and the singing of praise to God at the end of the service, we've seen nearly all of them stand by the closing minutes, because they've been touched by it."

Gateway staff report that about 40 men on average attend each Thursday—all of the chairs are full, and some men even sit on the floor.

 *Getting Free from A Lifestyle of Addiction continued:*

'I can choose not to do it'

She reentered the local rehab program, determined to complete the full two-week commitment. Jenice did and even overcame her fears about sharing her story in the nightly Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

To stay on track, she needed to find a faith-based sober living facility. A minister affiliated with the rehab facility told Jenice about the Gateway Forge Program, and she applied. "I'm so grateful I got in," she said. She wanted true freedom from the addictive patterns of her hometown life.

At Gateway Mission, Jenice encountered a depth of trauma-informed counseling, biblical teaching, and structured daily living that she had never had before.

Class teachings about the nature of addiction changed her mindset. Jenice said she had thought that alcoholism had passed down from her parents and inevitably there would be a "terrible ripple effect" with her now 10-year-old son.

"But that's not true," she said. "I do have a choice in it. And I can choose not to do it."

'God moments' at Gateway

Among the many "God moments" she has experienced at Gateway; Jenice recounts the fulfillment of a dream from years prior.

Jenice recalled a conversation with her sister when her son was young. "Wouldn't it be nice if I could be surrounded by trustworthy women who could watch him while I go to work?" she asked. "Then we could pay the bills and have a stable life."

She added: "Here I am, surrounded by a team that provides really great childcare. Who would have known that that would have come to fruition? My offhand, sarcastic remark was actually speaking to my future."

In December, after nearly a year of living sober, Jenice started in the Gateway Thrive program, interning within the ministry and earning a stipend.

Jenice has plans to begin training as a medical technician, saying the help she received at Gateway Mission sparked that vision for her life.

"God uses different experiences and trials in our lives to prepare for the path He has laid out for each of us," she said. "He transforms us little by little into who he desires us to be."



‘WE’VE LIVED IT’: THE MAN WHO ADVOCATES FOR GUESTS WAS ONCE ONE HIMSELF



“It was the worst thing I ever did in my life and the best thing I ever did.”

That’s what Gateway Mission Men’s Shelter Director, Greg Groen says about entering the Forge program eight years ago under difficult circumstances.

His story reveals the destructive nature of alcohol and drug addictions—which can devastate even the most unlikely people. Yet it also shows how Gateway’s approach is informed by firsthand experience.

In early 2016, Greg hit rock-bottom. After a DUI arrest, he spent time in jail. When a friend bailed him out, Greg learned that his wife of 33 years said she needed time apart from him. After 10 weeks, his friend said Greg’s couch-surfing and continued drinking had to end. Greg needed help.

On June 5, 2016, Greg was accepted as a student into the Gateway Forge Program, which is centered on addiction recovery, skills training, and Bible-based teaching. Enrolled guests work in the mission and adhere to strict living standards, while undergoing education and discipleship.

At first, Greg planned to short-circuit the nearly year-long program. “I thought, If I can just hold out doing this for two or three months, I can prove to my wife that, okay, I got help,” he said.

But something changed for him in those early months.

The commitment and honesty of fellow Forge students—most of them, men who had lived on the streets, far removed from Greg’s stable suburban lifestyle—exposed his deception.

“I had lived a fake Christian life for 58 years,” said Greg.

“I saw we all have problems. We all had lost families. This camaraderie of community and the Gospel showed me who Jesus really is.”

He performed daily chores in the kitchen and laundry areas assigned to him, and then some. Greg attended academic and life-skills classes, doing well in regular exams and other responsibilities. “I learned I had to say what I mean and be accountable,” he said.

Upon graduating from the Gateway Program, what did Greg feel? “Scared stiff,” he remembers.

He had a lengthy process ahead to get his driver’s license back and he needed a job. Gateway offered Greg an internship in the welcome center, which led to a position as a manager in the Gateway Store warehouse.

Meanwhile, through communication and rebuilding trust, Greg has taken steps to reconcile with his wife—a process he says he continually works on.

Relationships with his adult children have been restored, as Greg enjoys time with two grandkids. “My daughter told me that she has seen a total change in me,” he said, “And that means a lot.”

Later, Greg became a guest advocate and, in summer 2023, was named director of the men’s shelter. His recent transformation journey—going through the same process that he now coaches men to complete—helps him relate when a new guest sits down across from him at his desk.

“He’ll be going through his story of how he’s got here,” said Greg. “And my soul is crying because I’m screaming inside: *That was me*. My past is something I can never forget because I don’t want to repeat it.”



A LETTER FROM JAY RIEMERSMA

STAYING ON MISSION

In this issue of the Gateway Minute, spiritual aspects of our work have particularly shined through. From Jenice's powerful testimony to the update on Encounter services, to the story of our own Greg Groen, it's apparent the Gospel is foundational in all aspects of Gateway Mission.

Our mission statement at Gateway is upfront about this: We exist to declare and demonstrate the love of Christ by providing housing and programs for the homeless and less fortunate.

Still, we sometimes encounter skepticism about our unwavering dedication to Biblical principles. After all, we're in a time when many Christian-founded organizations have cut any theological or devotional aspects from their programs. But that's not going to happen at Gateway Mission.

Every day, we freely and joyfully provide shelter, meals, and services to any guest who comes in our doors. Our hope and prayer is that such sacrificial giving embodies the principles of Jesus Christ as we also share the Gospel.

Gateway Mission's Community Relations Coordinator Jason Parks teaches the Overcoming Addictions class, part of the core curriculum for men and women in the Forge Program. If you were to audit one of his classes, you'd likely hear him share a truth he repeats often.

Jason states that there is certainly no form or pledge declaring oneself a Christian that is required of graduates of Gateway programs. "But my sincere hope is that you come to recognize the transformative impact that Christ has had on my own life and that you, too, may experience His transformational power in yours," he adds.

It brings to mind 2 Corinthians 5:17, where the Apostle Paul writes: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

Just as the Holy Spirit renews our lives, I believe He is also bringing to life new things here at Gateway. We're seeing many friends like you catch the vision for addressing poverty in a holistic way. It's an approach that helps our community—and also reflects the Gospel of love and truth.

Together, let's bring hope, alleviate poverty, and work to see lives positively transformed.

Faithfully serving,

Jay Riemersma
Executive Director

