

Denise C. Dobbins

Founder, Promise of Hope, Inc.



I was raised in Georgia, the third child in a family of five. My father being a deacon, and my mother a Sunday school teacher, meant I was in the church each time the doors opened. I can remember having feelings of inadequacy even at an early age, never feeling as though I fit in anywhere. I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was twelve years old.

When I was fourteen, I began to drink, which allowed me to escape feelings of inadequacy. For the first time in my life, I felt like I "fit in". Even though I got very sick the first time I got drunk, I knew I wanted to do it again, because I felt "good" when I was drunk...Free from pain and insecurities . When I was fifteen, I began to experiment with street drugs, and found I enjoyed these much more, mainly because they didn't smell. I felt I was very good at hiding the fact that I was high from my parents and everyone else.

I graduated high school, only by the grace of God, and moved to Atlanta to attend dental assisting school. I became deeper involved in drug use while there. I remember when I was nineteen, realizing that I didn't know how to function without being high, or knowing that I would have a way to get high that day. It was all that kept me going. The saying, "I used to live and lived to use" was true of my life. After two years of bouncing checks, getting financial help from home to pay bills, a lifestyle that should have rendered me dead, I tried a geographical cure from my misery. I moved back home, but the lifestyle remained the same. About ten months later, I moved to Charleston S.C. to try again. I failed. It seemed that everywhere I moved (and I moved a lot!), I would not actively seek out the drug crowd, but always ended up with those types of people. Satan is very powerful. After two years in Charleston, I moved to Jacksonville, Fla., again seeking a better life. I stayed about two years, again with nothing changing. I moved back home, defeated. And couldn't figure out why.

I got a job at a nursing home and began to work a new career. I would get off work and go straight to pick up something to get high on. I had been away so long from home, by now all of my connections were dead, in jail, or moved. So I began to drink again when I could not find drugs. One afternoon, I went to pick up my drugs and met the man I married three months later. I was eventually fired for drinking on the job.

Our marriage began, obviously, on a very sick note. My husband had a very good job, so I stayed home getting high. I didn't like it at all when he came home one day and said I couldn't get high anymore when he was at work. For the first time in my life, someone had told me that I couldn't use when I wanted to...Our marriage struggled from this point until learning I was expecting our first child. I stopped using drugs, hoping to do my best with this baby. Our son was born a beautiful, healthy baby. That is one of God's blessings I thank Him for daily.

After my six weeks check up, my husband let me start back having mixed drinks with him occasionally. When he went to work, I would use the money he'd given me for groceries or diapers, to buy drugs. When our son was thirteen months old, I found out I was pregnant again. I did not want to be pregnant. When I went to the doctor for my first check up, I complained with my back and he gave me pain pills. He assured me this would not hurt my baby. He didn't realize when the prescription read "one every four hours", I was taking "four every one hour." I had no problems getting the pills, or having them refilled. I lost thirteen pounds while I was carrying this baby. When our daughter was born, she weighed 5lbs 4ozs., nothing but skin and bones. But God took care of her when I couldn't. Once she was out of my body, within three days she turned into the most beautiful baby I'd seen.

Having been raised in the church, I knew I needed to have my children in church. We were always in services--I may have been loaded, but I made sure we were there. When our daughter was eighteen months old, I woke up one morning realizing that "normal" people surely didn't live like this--getting out of bed, popping pills before I got breakfast for my children, or grabbing them out of bed, not changing diapers, to run to the drug store and pick up a new supply. To look at my life from the outside, things appeared fairly normal, whatever that is...but inside I was dying.

I couldn't do anything without knowing I had pills, or at least knowing I would be able to get some that day. I sought help from a doctor who sent me to Parkside for treatment. I stayed 36 days, aced the program, graduated with honors (?), went home and relapsed five weeks later. A year later, my Husband came home one evening from work and went in to kiss the children goodnight, but they were not in bed. I didn't remember where they were. I had taken them to my parent's home early that morning, and did not remember the trip.

The next Monday morning, I was on my way to Mississippi for a three-month extended treatment program. Again, I aced the program, graduated with honors, came home and relapsed five days later. My family just quit talking to me, never making contact, and my husband looked at me one morning and said, " You don't have to worry about me taking the kids away from you, you'll take care of that all by yourself. You're just a drug addict, you're going to die high."

After we moved to where we built our home, I began to attend Church. Here, I would sit and listen to this Sunday school teacher that talked about how loving and forgiving God is. I had always heard this, but never felt it. The God I grew up learning about was a God that would send me to hell for dancing, and by the time I was fifteen, I'd done a lot worse than dance. But as this lady talked, I knew she had a peace I wanted. All I could do was sit and listen as tears streamed down my face. She came up to me one Sunday and asked if I would like to talk sometime. We met; I shared with her that I was an addict. She began to disciple me, encourage me, and she

requested honesty from me. Even when I used, she encouraged me to be honest with her. She loved me no matter what I did, or what I told her. I fell under conviction very strongly one morning and decided to quit using. This was three months after she began to disciple me. I gathered up all of my syringes and carried them to the dumpster. When I got home, my connection called with a "fresh batch". I hesitated, but told her I would be there in ten minutes. I went and picked up the pills, drove home and realized I had thrown away all of my syringes. I drove to the dumpster and climbed in to look for them. (My addiction had progressed to the point that I was dissolving the pills in water to draw them up in a syringe and shoot them into my veins.) It seemed the more this lady shared Jesus with me, the more Satan fought to keep me.

This teacher had spent time teaching me about the unconditional love of Jesus Christ. (Most importantly, through her example) While I was inside the dumpster, it seemed like the whole world stopped, even the wind. All of a sudden, I saw myself as God saw me. I felt so ashamed, and at the same time, I felt this tremendous love that I had never experienced before. I got out, went home, fell on my knees and prayed to God. My prayer went something like this, "God, if you will just give me one day without the craving of alcohol or drugs, you can have my husband, my children, my new home, my car, anything, anything you need to make me the person you created me to be. I felt a release. I got up off my knees, not trusting what I had felt, or even knowing what I had felt, but with a willingness to walk in it that I'd never had before.

This teacher walked me through the healing process of a Christian based twelve step program, and encouraged me to attend AA and NA meetings until I had a better grip on things. All the support that was available to me, she directed me to it. I thank God for her courage to reach out to me. I "surrendered" my life to Jesus Christ January 17, 1991. At that time, I didn't trust the God I was surrendering to...but I knew a Sunday school teacher who did! I believed in the trust she had, until my own developed. Eleven months later, my husband went to treatment and we began to really work on surrendering our lives together....

Four years after my surrender, I knew that God was calling me to a ministry for women who live in the same bondage as I had for twenty-two years. I began to pray and sought the prayers of people I knew who believed in prayer. We prayed for Him to provide a way for me to do this work He was calling me to do. Three and a half years later, we felt it was time to form a board of directors, and look for a place to house this ministry. We opened our doors in May of 1999. We have seen evidence of just how powerfully transforming the love of Jesus truly is.