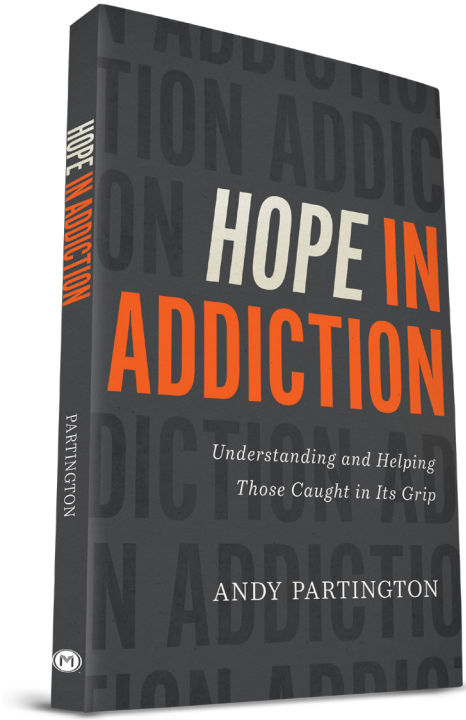

Addiction care developed from Partington's travels, research, and global ministry. The church and our communities are full of people at risk of addiction, in active addiction, and in recovery. This is about how slaves to addiction can experience freedom as *children* of the living God and *family* in the community of God.

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Chapter 1

ONE IN FIVE

THUNDERING HERD

In a quiet corner of Spring Hill Cemetery, occupying an elevated position in the center of Huntington, West Virginia, an understated granite cenotaph pays silent tribute to the seventy-five men and women who perished in one of America's deadliest aviation disasters. Southern Airways flight 932 took to the air in Kinston, North Carolina, at 6:38 p.m. on Saturday, November 14, 1970. Marshall University's resurgent football team, the Thundering Herd, its coaching staff, and boosters were on board, heading home disappointed by a 17–14 loss to the East Carolina Pirates. It was the team's first flight of the year. Flight 932 would never reach its destination. Visibility was poor that night, with air-traffic control warning of rain, fog, smoke, and a "ragged ceiling" of clouds over Huntington's Tri-State Airport. The descending DC-9 clipped trees on a hillside west of the airport and crashed nose-first into a gully just over half a mile from the runway. Crash investigators would later describe the accident as "nonsurvivable."[1]

The devastating events of that night, powerfully depicted in the 2006 film *We Are Marshall*, profoundly shaped the people of Huntington. Indeed, as I talk to Steve Williams, mayor of Huntington, I notice a large portrait of that 1970 Thundering Herd team hanging behind his desk in his city hall office. A former member of the Marshall football team, Steve tells me why it occupies a place of pride and distinction in his office. "I have the portrait up here to let people know—if you want to understand the city, understand what happened there. This defines our city. We've been taken to our knees before, and we had the strength to stand up."[2]

This is my first time in Appalachia. As I explore Huntington, a small city of forty-five thousand people and three hundred-plus churches that hugs the south bank of the Ohio River, I feel far from metropolitan America and what I've experienced in places like New York, Miami, Las Vegas, San Francisco—and even further from the madness of LA's Skid Row. And yet, in the awkward gait and gray faces of some who walk these streets, there's a "tell," a sign that below the surface, Huntington is a small community wrestling with what we once thought of as a big-city problem: drug addiction. Specifically, an addiction epidemic centered on prescription painkillers, heroin, and a potent synthetic opioid called fentanyl.

In the days after August 15, 2016, global media outlets christened Huntington the "epicenter" of the US opioid crisis after twenty-eight people overdosed, two of them fatally, in the space of just five hours.[3] The following year, there were 1,831 overdoses, and 132 overdose deaths in Huntington and surrounding Cabell County.[4] Without naloxone, a drug that counters the effects of an overdose, hundreds more would have perished. To put it another way, in 2017 Huntington lost almost twice as many of its citizens to overdoses as it did to the 1970 Marshall air disaster.

Just a few short steps from the Marshall Memorial, the headstones of overdose victims stand tall among the many hundreds

that fill the green lawns of Spring Hill Cemetery. It's hard to avoid drawing comparisons between the two tragedies. Both brought Huntington to international attention. Both have shaped the identity of the community. The first, abrupt and dramatic, afflicted the city's young heroes and became a source of strength and inspiration. The second unfolds slowly in dark rooms, riverside tents, hospitals, and courtrooms. Its victims are "junkies," men, women, and young people who fund their addictions through crime and prostitution.

DEATH GRIP

Huntington is just one of countless US communities—urban, suburban, rural—that find themselves in the relentless death grip of opioid addiction. Huntington's experience may be extreme, but it's not exceptional. Half of all Americans report knowing someone who has struggled with opioid addiction. Not an addiction in general—not even a drug addiction specifically. Half of Americans know someone who has struggled with *opioid* addiction.[5]

Drug overdoses are the leading cause of death among Americans under fifty.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveals that drug overdoses in the United States surpassed a hundred thousand per year for the first time during the twelve months leading to April 2021.[6] These figures represent a 28.5 percent increase over the previous year, a jump explained by the rise in the use of fentanyl—a powerful synthetic opioid used to heighten the effects of heroin and cocaine, with or without the user's knowledge—as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] Drug overdoses are the leading cause of death among Americans under fifty.[8] Across the whole population, they kill twice as many people as car accidents and gun violence combined.[9] A 2017 report by the news service

STAT, built on interviews with leading public health experts across ten universities, argues that between 2017 and 2027, opioids will claim close to half a million American lives.[10] The total number of American military personnel lost to armed conflict since the end of World War II, more than seventy-five years ago, stands at less than a third of that figure (152,883).[11]

It wasn't always this way. Drug overdoses on this scale are a relatively new public health issue. "The year 1979 was a turning point for the world's wealthiest nation," writes Timothy McMahan King in *Addiction Nation*. "That year marked the beginning of the exponential growth of drug overdoses in America. Out of every 100,000 people, 1.13 people died from an accidental drug overdose; in 2016 that number hit 16.96. Every nine years since [1979], drug overdose deaths have doubled, claiming a total of 599,255 lives . . ."[12]

The opioid crisis has grabbed the headlines and occupied our attention in recent years. However, opioids constitute just one part of a national substance-addiction epidemic that includes a range of other drugs and, of course, alcohol.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, in 2020, 40.3 million people aged twelve or older had a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year.[13] Of these, 28.3 million had alcohol use disorder, 18.4 million had an illicit drug use disorder, and 6.5 million had both alcohol use disorder and an illicit drug use disorder. Today, the number of Americans addicted to drugs and/or alcohol exceeds the population of California.

Globally, best estimates suggest that about 1.4 percent have an alcohol use disorder,[14] while just under 1 percent have some form of illicit drug dependency.[15] That's 2 percent of the world's population addicted to alcohol and/or drugs.[16] And the number is rising. An international team of experts analyzed trends in alcohol intake in 189 countries. Their research, published in *The Lancet* in 2019, revealed that while alcohol consumption in high-income countries

is stable or dropping, there has been a massive rise in low- and middle-income countries like India, China, and Vietnam. By 2030, it is projected that roughly half of all adults will drink alcohol, and 23 percent of the world population will binge-drink at least once a month.[17]

OBJECTS OF ADDICTION

A tremendous variety of substances enslave us. Methamphetamine addiction—use of which continues to rise across the US[18]—is also on the rise globally. In Southeast Asia, meth is the primary drug of concern in treatment.[19] In Bolivia, where I lived and worked for much of the past fifteen years, and in the other cocaine-producing countries of Latin America, coca paste—an intermediate product of the process of cocaine—is favored by street addicts, who smoke it with tobacco or cannabis. In the UK, Spice, a "synthetic marijuana" manufactured mainly in China and one of a vast number of new psychoactive substances (NPS) to hit the market in the last ten to fifteen years, has become a drug of choice in prisons. Studies suggest that 60 to 90 percent of the British prison population have used Spice while inside.[20] It's cheap, easy to smuggle, and hard to beat if you're killing time. "It just knocks you out cold," writes Mike Power in *The Guardian*. "And that's the point: users want total shutdown. . . . A few tokes and it's game over for six hours."[21] Across Africa, a crisis is unfolding with the prescription opioid Tramadol. In an article for *The Independent*, Laura Salm-Reifferscheidt writes, "Refugees in northern Nigeria . . . use Tramadol to deal with post-traumatic stress. In Gabon, it has infiltrated schools under the name Kobolo, leading to kids having seizures in class, while in Ghana, the 'Tramadol dance' is trending, basing its zombie-like moves on the way people behave when they're high on the painkiller. . . . Among the ranks of Boko Haram and Isis, Tramadol tablets are taken by fighters, leading them to be dubbed 'jihadist pills.'"[22]

In the middle of all this, it would be easy to overlook nicotine addiction. The World Health Organization estimates that smoking claims eight million lives every year, meaning one in seven global deaths are the result of tobacco (direct smoking and secondhand smoke). In several countries, including China and Denmark, more than 20 percent of deaths result from smoking. Tragically, as measures to reduce smoking in developed countries have proven effective, tobacco companies have shifted their marketing to low- and middle-income countries, with experts predicting that during the twenty-first century, a billion people could die as a result of tobacco addictions—ten times as many as died in the twentieth century.[23]

As substance addictions rise, so does a second category of habits: behavioral addictions.

As substance addictions rise, so does a second category of habits: behavioral, or process, addictions. Activities widely considered to have addictive potential include gambling, work, exercise, pornography, sex, food, gaming, shopping, and the internet in a multitude of forms. Indeed, in the form of the globally ubiquitous smartphone, we are now physically connected—twenty-four seven in many cases—to the suppliers of the objects of addiction. In some cases, it may take a few minutes for the dealer to deliver, but likely no longer than your local pizza delivery service. In others, the product is just a click or two away, often—as in the case of online gambling platforms and clothing retailers—accompanied by powerful inducements designed to make it easier for you to dive in than to walk away.

An extensive study of behavioral addiction, published in 2011 and conducted by a team of researchers led by Professor Mark Griffiths of England's Nottingham Trent University, reviewed eighty-three research studies covering 1.5 million respondents from four continents. Its conclusion? Even back then, in the days before Apple's

iPad and the launch of Instagram, 41 percent of us struggled with at least one behavioral addiction to the extent that it interfered with the performance of life roles (e.g., job, social activities, hobbies); impaired social relationships; led to criminal activity and legal problems; and spurred involvement in dangerous situations, physical injury and impairment, financial loss, or emotional trauma.[24]

We must not underestimate the extent of behavioral addictions nor their capacity to cause serious harm. Marc Lewis, a neuroscientist and recovering heroin addict, stresses the fact that "behavioral addictions assume the same characteristics, the same trajectory, and often the same outcomes as substance addictions . . . they too turn out to have serious consequences, including broken relationships, broken health, and sometimes death." What's more, Lewis explains, "the neural consequences of behavioral addictions indicate the same cellular mechanisms and the same biological alterations that underlie drug addiction."[25]

BEHIND EACH DIGIT

"Addiction today is epidemic and catastrophic," writes the neuroscientist Judith Grisel. "Worldwide addiction may be the most formidable health problem, affecting about one in every five people over the age of fourteen. In purely financial terms, it costs more than five times as much as AIDS and twice as much as cancer. In the United States, this means that close to 10 percent of all healthcare expenditures go toward prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of people suffering from addictive diseases, and the statistics are similarly frightening in most other Western cultures."[26]

These are colossal numbers. And, behind each digit, you will find heartbreaking stories of personal suffering and sorrow. In *Beating the Dragon*, James McIntosh and Neil McKeganey draw on a series of intensive interviews with seventy recovering drug addicts from

across Scotland to shed light on both addiction and recovery. Their reflections on addiction's impact on people's outlook, character, self-esteem, relationships, and health, as well as the way it led them into crime and other risky behaviors such as prostitution, make for sobering reading.

"My whole life," said Kenny, one of the interviewees, "was centered on drugs and any means to get them. My whole life revolved around drugs, drugs, drugs."[27] Maggie noted how addiction stole from her any sense of personal hygiene or self-care: "I used to be a clean person, my hair, my appearance. When I took drugs, that all went, and I used to have the same clothes on for weeks on end . . . stinking, not caring . . . as I say, these things don't matter when you've got a drug habit. They just go out the window."[28]

Steve described how years spent trying to fund his addiction turned him into someone no one could trust, a person he himself loathed. "I saw the ways I was going to get money to get drugs, and I didn't like it . . . shoplifting. I was breaking in, lots of sick things. I would rip off anybody. Someone would give me their trust, and that's me; I've ripped them off kind of thing. Like somebody would give me a loan of money, and I wouldn't pay them back. There were hundreds of these scams. Nobody trusted me anymore, know what I mean? I didn't trust myself anymore."[29]

Nancy detailed how addiction distorted her personality and, as a result, damaged her relationships. "I didn't recognize the person I was . . . I was just a nippy horrible person that fought with everybody; I didn't have a kind word for anybody. I spoke to people as if they were absolute dirt, and I wasn't really in a position to speak to anybody in that manner. I'd totally lost it. The person I'd turned into was just totally unbelievable."[30]

Bridie's addiction led her down a path she believed she would never go down and left her feeling worthless.

> This friend of mine was in a massage parlor at the time . . . this was how she was feeding her habit. And all the things I said I would never ever do, I did it. I used to say I would never get to that stage. If I got as bad as that, I would stop. Then it's easier said than done. . . . So I went for an interview in a massage parlor and . . . I thought it was like a talking interview. But I later learned the interview wasn't. His very words were that he had to try me out to see if I was good enough. He paid me for it, and I walked out of there, and I felt so cheap and so dirty, but I was so tired of being arrested for shoplifting. I had nowhere else to turn, it was my only means of money, and basically the only things in mind was drugs, getting money for drugs. . . . My kind of day when I was working was work all night, sleep during the day, wake up about five, take my drugs, and out again to sell my body.[31]

Addiction's toll on Mary's physical health was the thing that ultimately prompted her to go after recovery seriously. "When I really decided I wanted to clean up, my health was zilch. I was covered in abscesses from head to toe, everywhere. I was only six stone [84 lb.], nobody would talk to me, nobody liked me, I didn't like myself. . . . So it came to the crunch when I decided to clean up, 'right Mary, you're either going to die young or you're going to clean up; what are you going to do?' And that's when I decided it's time to clean up."[32]

After a fourteen-year drug habit, Dorothy's recovery began with a similar reckoning with the damage drugs were doing to her. "I couldn't take it anymore. Mentally, physically, and spiritually I was broke. I was wasted. I was killing myself, slowly committing suicide. . . . I was going in and out of places, hospitals, and jails and institutions, and all that stuff. My brain and my body were so tired of it all. I'd had enough."[33]

Gambling, sex, and porn addicts will tell similar stories of

gradual mental, physical, and spiritual decay. So, too, will alcoholics. All addictions lead down this path to ruin. Shopaholics run up unmanageable debts, lose trust in relationships, and find their mental health compromised. Workaholics place intolerable strains on their minds, bodies, and families. Gaming addicts untether from educational opportunities, pull away from personal relationships, and neglect nutrition and physical health.

Alongside the direct harm addiction causes to adults and young people, it has a devastating impact on children, whose stories are less commonly told. For decades, Gallup has asked the general population: "Has drinking ever been a cause of trouble in your family?" In 1948, 15 percent of respondents replied yes. By the early 1970s, it had dropped slightly to 12 percent. Since then, the figure has been rising steadily, reaching 37 percent in 2019—the highest number ever recorded.[34] Today, close to nine million children (12 percent of American children) live with at least one parent who has a substance use disorder.[35] In the year 2000, parental use of drugs and/or alcohol contributed to 18.5 percent of child welfare agency decisions to remove children to out-of-home care. By 2018, this figure had more than doubled after two decades of steady growth, to 39 percent of cases.[36] Also in 2018, one in ten pregnant women disclosed that they were current alcohol users, and 5.4 percent disclosed that they were current users of illicit drugs. That same year, 11.6 percent of pregnant women stated that they were current tobacco users.[37] From 2000 to 2012, the number of infants treated for neonatal abstinence syndrome (opioid withdrawal symptoms) increased more than fivefold.[38]

"You're either going to die young or you're going to clean up."

The parents in McIntosh and McKeganey's group of Scottish addicts in recovery didn't pull their punches as they described the

impact of addiction on their children. "I really neglected the kids because of my drugs," said Frances. "They weren't properly fed, and their clothes, just generally neglected. And I didn't bother with what they were doing, who they were going about with, how they were getting on at school or anything. It was just drugs, drugs, drugs."[39]

Another mother, Kathleen, confessed that she continues to be haunted by her failure to protect her son from abuse due to her drug-taking. "My eldest son had bruises on the side of his face, and I think it was my partner that hit him, but I was too out of my face to notice. I just hold on to things like that, what could have happened and what has happened."[40]

Mark expressed the same sense of abiding guilt for the harm caused by the priority he gave to drug-taking over his children's well-being. "I still can't put into words to this day how I feel about it. . . . He was parked in the room when people wanted to inject. If he didn't stay in the room, he'd maybe walk in, and we'd be sitting with a needle in our arm. He's seen a lot of things he shouldn't have seen, and that's what I feel guilty about."[41]

360°

Addiction once ran through our lives in narrow channels. Today, having burst its banks, it swamps a vast floodplain. Addiction is now the experience of the many, not the few. To use Stanton Peele's phrase, addiction is the "thematic malady of our society."[42] By the millions, we live as slaves to the neurochemical forces unleashed by a range of psychoactive substances and behaviors. We live under the ruinous shadow of an addicted parent, child, or partner by the tens of millions. Collectively, we suffer from the pressure addiction places on our economy and our health, social care, and criminal justice systems.

Christians must be realistic. Addiction is not an "out there" issue. The floodwaters of addiction have broken through the doors

of our churches. In 2018, Lifeway Research surveyed a thousand Protestant pastors to understand their congregations' experience of the opioid crisis. Two-thirds said a family member of someone in their congregation had been personally affected by opioid abuse. More than half had someone dealing with opioid addiction in their congregation.[43] According to Barna Group research, 12 percent of youth pastors and 5 percent of pastors say they are addicted to pornography,[44] while among the wider church population, 21 percent of men and 2 percent of women say they think they are addicted to porn.[45]

Where you are, the addiction problem may be less severe—or just less visible?—than it is in Huntington, on Skid Row, in the cells of Britain's prisons, and the tents of northern Nigeria's refugee camps. Nevertheless, addiction is increasingly hard to ignore. As God's people, we live as "foreigners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11) in an *addicted* world. Addiction is a feature of our missional context, an aspect of our cultures that we need to recognize, interpret, and engage.

Addiction is a 360-degree issue. It's behind us, shaping our personal and collective stories. It's around us, shaping our communities and how our neighbors think, feel, and act. It's ahead of us; all the evidence indicates that addictions of all kinds are on the rise. How did we get here? What is it about our times, and those that have gone before, that has ushered in an age of addiction?

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