

## **25. RECOVERY IN THE UNDERGROUND OASIS**

### **The Underground Oasis story: as told by Dale Johnston**

The Underground Oasis is a safe place in the desert of this world. It is a place all of us who are involved in this ministry longed to find when we were lost in our addictions. We all tried numerous programs to get and stay clean but each one failed. Yes, we could maintain for a few months, but no matter how diligent we were at changing our behavior, we found it never changed who we were. We were told that once an addict...always an addict.

I used to hate going to AA and NA meetings where I had to introduce myself by saying, "Hi, my name is Dale and I'm an addict." I knew that was not who I was! I also knew that it was not who God had created me to be. I was created to be much more than an addict. I am a child of God. A God who loves me. I hated the failure identity I was claiming but didn't know what to do about it.

Late one night in November of 2004, my brother, Steve "Mad Max" Fund, called me and asked if I could meet with one of his employees who was just coming down from a 2 week meth binge and was suicidal. Johnny was 42 years old and had been "slamming" (using meth by needle) for 20 years. He was at the end of his resources and saw no other way out than to end his life. I had recently met Leo Bristol, who had spent 15 years in prison due to his addiction to meth and who recently had been baptized. I knew him as a powerful "God Man" who could relate well to Johnny's current condition. We spent 2 hours with Johnny and I watched as Leo connected with him on a very personal level.

Leo had been the biggest and most feared meth dealer in our community for years. He would be sentenced to prison for 3-5 year stints but would return to the old life as soon as he was released. But during his last 5 year sentence, Leo had a very personal encounter with Jesus. When the cell door slammed behind him the last time, he fell to his knees and said:

"God, I'm tired of this life. I'm tired of doing drugs and going to prison. If you are real, you have to do something right now to save me."

Instantly there was a knock on his cell and a blue arm, one covered with prison tattoos, was reaching through the bars to shake his hand. This person said:

Brother Leo, the Lord has directed me to ask you to come and join our Bible study.

From that day on, his life would never be the same. Upon his release, he and I had been praying that in some way, God would direct us to a specific ministry that would make a difference in the lives of these hopeless people.

When we finished praying and intervening with Johnny that night and were walking towards the door, Johnny said something that would forever change our lives. He said simply:

I have a lot of friends who need to hear what you all just shared with me.

It was like God just hit us with a clap of thunder. We all felt the same thing. This was our ministry. We were joined by a young man by the name of Kirk Shea, who desired to be part of this outreach and who also had been deeply involved in the drug life.

We wanted to develop a recovery program that boldly proclaimed *God* as our Higher Power; the *God* who is able to heal us from any and all destructive dependencies and habits. We are not talking about just being clean and sober. We are talking about being *free*. *There is a big difference*. We believe that God has the power to heal us, not just make us clean and sober. He is in the business of bringing victory to those who are hopeless and helpless.

“Biggin” is one of our members who runs our UO program in a neighboring town and is fond of saying:

I was once a hopeless dope addict... now I am a dopeless hope addict!

How to develop a program that was relevant to the needs of this drug culture was a daunting task. None of us knew where to start, so we did the most logical thing. We prayed. We asked God to open the door to a program that would glorify Him. One week later while walking through a book store the title of a book caught my attention. It was a book by Neil Anderson and Mike Quarles entitled *Freedom From Addiction...Breaking the Bondage of Addiction and Finding Freedom in Christ*. It was exactly what we needed to help us see that God’s way to freedom did not depend on me “working a program” but on understanding who I was in Christ and that He accepts me as I am, not as I should be. That through His power I am dead to sin and alive through Jesus. The Underground Oasis prayer says:

Lord I give you permission to work in my life today. I know I am dead to sin and alive in you. And today I choose to believe what you say is true regardless of how I feel.

So many of our decisions as addicts have been based on emotions and feelings that are not reliable. So we teach that God’s promises are true. Believe what He says about you...do not rely on how you *feel*.

We all understood that our program had to be a format that would be familiar to those who had been used to the traditional 12 step program. But we were determined to put God into the process—not just a nameless “Higher Power.” So we rewrote the 12 steps inserting God into the Program and attempting to take out the secular humanistic approach that stressed mothering more than behavior modification. Our goal was to clarify the perception of God’s character: to teach about relationship with Jesus, not just using white knuckle effort to help overcome addictions. We also wanted to abolish the belief that you could choose anything from the light bulb to the doorknob as your Higher Power and expect that power to keep you clean and sober.

Our meetings are three night per week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. After four plus years of this schedule we found ourselves extremely busy. The courts recognized us as a viable program and we receive court mandated people who are required to attend a recovery meeting. We do not care why they come or who sends them. They often hear the truth of the

Gospel for the first time at the Underground Oasis. I began feeling that God wanted us to do more than just have three meetings a week. But I was unsure of exactly what could be done to be more involved in helping these people who were struggling with their addictions.

In February 2009 I buried a young man who had died of the effects of years of substance abuse. He was 41 years old. His name was Parley. He was so deeply entrenched in the drug world that it finally killed him. He would come to Oasis and pray for deliverance but he could never follow through. I worked with him for 6 years, long before we started the Underground Oasis. He would show up at church on the Sabbath and would be a faithful member of the Oasis program for a while and then disappear back out into the drug world.

On his death bed I was blessed to be able to assure him of God's grace and love. He was able to accept God's forgiveness and died in assurance of the resurrection. His last words to me were:

My life has not amounted to anything Dale, please tell my friends to live life God's way and not to end up like me.

When I did Parley's memorial service, 55 people showed up from our town who I did not recognize. They turned out to be the "night people." They were meth addicts who had no place to go except the bars and other crack houses. Even if they wanted to get clean, they had nowhere to go. I met some of the most beautiful young people whose hair was falling out, their teeth were rotting and they had open sores on their bodies. My heart went out to them and it was then that God began to speak to me about doing something to address this tragedy.

"Mad Max" owns the building in which we had been holding our meeting, and I approached him about my idea. Although the story is long and involved the outcome is that in the Spring of 2010, The Higher Grounds Coffee Shop opened up on Main Street here in LaGrande, Oregon. It is a 24 hour, 7 days a week *safe place* for those who are trying to maintain their sobriety. It is staffed by our Underground Oasis members and each night we have facilitators who are there to reach out to the young people who come.

If you want to get pulled out of your comfort zone, come and spend a few hours with us. Some of the most precious young people you will ever meet will be there. Their stories are heart rending. Their lives have been strewn with wreckage. Most do not have parents who care. Many have parents in prison. Many are homeless. There are many very young single mothers. In our town of 13,000 there are over 70 homeless teens.

Underground Oasis is working on a grant to build a teen safe house for these children. There is a plaque over the door of our meeting place now that reads "The Parley Room." Parley's life is going to make a difference now.

The story goes on. When God opens the door for ministry you can never stand still. God leads you into a deeper relationship and a deeper ministry than you ever expected.

**AT THE UNDERGROUND OASIS, WE DO NOT CARE ABOUT WHERE YOU'VE BEEN,  
WE CARE ABOUT WHERE YOU'RE GOING.**

By Dale Johnston Co-originator of Underground Oasis



Figures 42, 43. Kirk, Leo, Dale



Mad Max

## A BIBLE BASED GUIDE TO FREEDOM

The process of learning occurs by increments. Mathematics is learned by starting with the most basic rules and then adding to those with additional principles. We often use the term “steps” to refer to this process. Alcoholic Anonymous proceeded in its recovery program by a step by step program. In II Peter I:4-8 Peter takes us step by step through an ascending set of character building characteristics known as Peter’s ladder, which bears fruit for Christ. A little book by E.G. White entitled “*Steps to Christ*” illuminates the way to be in Christ through a step by step spiritual growth process. So, too, has Underground Oasis formed a series of steps based solely on scripture and Biblical principles to bring recovery and freedom to the addict.

Underground Oasis program is very similar to the steps outlined in *Steps to Christ*; the steps may not be in the exact same sequence but overall cover the same principles. Both are designed to lead a person to the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and that by faith in His shed blood at the cross we may be transformed into His likeness and receive salvation. At the very first lesson in Underground Oasis program a bold proclamation is made that the Creator God of the Universe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is the Power by which lives are changed and it will be the only Power recognized in the program. And that the word “God” when used in the recovery sessions always refers to Jesus Christ the Divine Son of God, the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved. Prayer to this God is always made at the beginning of every meeting. If the phrase “Higher Power” is ever used, unless stated differently, it also only refers to Jesus Christ.

Each participant is considered to be a child of the King, and upon introduction is to be recognized as such and not as an alcoholic or an addict of some habit—a failure in humanity. Yes there is the all true fact of the problem burdening the person seeking recovery; one must face up to it and be honest about it. However, rehearsing each time one is introduced or introduces ones self, by stating that he or she is a failure only strengthens that conviction and interferes with

accepting that a person is a loved and valued child of God. It keeps one in bondage where God promises that in Christ there is freedom from the sinful nature.

This course teaches that addictive problems are an “identity” problem; who are we? It presents four basic truths as to who we are:

- 1) I am accepted in Christ: I am bought with a price, I Corinth 6:20; Redeemed, Col. 1:14; Justified, Rom. 5:1; complete in Christ Col. 2:10
- 2) I am secure in Christ: Free from condemnation Rom. 8:1; I cannot be separated from Christ.
- 3) I am significant in Christ.
- 4) I am free in Christ.

The introduction the first night is:

This is a Christ centered ministry. This program may not be for you, but then, again, it may be just the thing you need to help overcome your destructive dependencies and habits. If you have tried everything else and it has not worked, why not give God a chance.

It is made clear that the leader conducting the class is not attempting to bring a “religion” to those in attendance, or to suggest that “religion” can save them from their addictions but that a “friendship with God can.” The leader, holding a Bible, shares that those who have been attending, love what is in that book as it has brought them freedom from their addictions. It is boldly proclaimed that the program is **Bible** based.

Does this boldness of a Bible based approach cause those seeking help to reject and flee from the meetings? That has not been the experience of Underground Oasis. They have programs in six states and have been operating for several years and I am told that people bolting from a meeting because it is Bible-based has been rare.

Underground Oasis takes the first step by helping the attendees understand that God loves us just as we are, Christ died for me even while I rejected Him. A person under addiction is brought to recognize and admit that **he is powerless** to pull him or herself up out of this human failure. There is no power within self that can do it. One is led to understand that my problem is the end result of *living apart* from the Creator God of the Universe. It is a result of not knowing one’s true identity, that you are a child of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This King loves us even in our state of bondage and slavery and He is willing and anxious to break that bondage and give us freedom.

The Biblical book of Romans chapter 7 describes the condition of man, often though he is a proclaimed believer in God, he is also in the slavery and bondage of sin, addiction, dependency, frustration, failure, condemnation, etc., it is referred to as “carnal”, and being “in the flesh.” Man in his mind wants to do what is right but his “self,” “carnal,” being “in the flesh” keeps him

from doing it and he does what he does not want to do. Then we have the story of victory over this condition through the “Spirit”, of being “in Christ Jesus” in Romans chapter 8. For a person to be “in” Christ Jesus means that he or she has accepted Christ as his or her Savior. The person trusts Him implicitly and has decided to make Christ’s way of life his or her own way. The result is a close personal union with Christ.

The name “Underground Oasis” was chosen for this recovery program because of its special meaning. The following definition is given by the Underground Oasis organization.

The Oxford Universal dictionary defines the word “oasis” as a “fertile spot in the desert.” Throughout history, weary travelers would find refuge at an *oasis*; a refuge from the extreme heat as their caravans crossed the vast wasteland. There they could regain their strength and rest their animals before continuing on through lonely seas of sand. ...The **Underground Oasis** is a safe refuge for today’s weary travelers, who are struggling through our own wasteland of addiction. A place where we can find rest, a rest that can only be found through Jesus Christ. He is our fertile spot in the desert of this world. From His Word we can drink freely giving us the strength and regeneration that is needed to break the chains that bind us; a place where we can again become clean, productive members of society. Fertile ground for the fruits of the Lord and sharing with others what Jesus Christ can do for us.

Here at the “**Underground Oasis**”, we don’t care about where you’ve been. We care about where you’re going. OASIS by Kirk Shea.

Anonymity in Underground Oasis is maintained just as it is in Alcoholics Anonymous, however, when being introduced or introducing oneself it is counterproductive to refer to being a failure, an alcoholic, a dooper, a rage-aholic etc., as repeating such creates a deeper impression on the mind that one is what one calls himself. The introduction to be used is “I am -----, a child of the King, struggling with the uncontrollable use of alcohol” or whatever the addiction is. Behavior is consistent with belief. Truth as it is in Christ is the key to receiving power that breaks from slavery and bondage.

The following quotation is the nightly welcome presented to the attendees of a meeting of Underground Oasis.

Hello, my name is----- . I’d like to welcome everyone to the Underground Oasis. We dedicate this time and program to God and our loving savior Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that everyone here will receive a blessing as well as the hope and tools needed to overcome any and all destructive habits and dependencies. Thank you for coming.

Belief in and accepting a power above “self” is mandatory to overcoming. The apostle Paul shares with us the way out of being “in the flesh.”

Therefore, there is no condemnation to those who are hid in Christ by faith. For the Holy Spirit has given me a new life in Christ and has freed me from the controlling power of my sinful nature which always stands ready to put me back on the road to death. No matter how holy and good the law of God is, it is powerless to save me from my sinful self. But what God's law could not do, His Son did. God sent Him to earth to take on human nature, to condemn sin and to overthrow its power. He did this so that by His obedience the righteous requirements of the law could be transferred to us who no longer follow our sinful human natures, but shape our lives according to the Spirit. Romans 8:1-4 (Clear Word)

As a result of accepting the power of Jesus Christ to bring us from death to life we then undergo a **transformation**. We still have those sinful impulses but we now have a Power from above that is able to give us a new heart so as to overcome the sinful drives and replace them with healthful patterns in life. This is *a process* for most people and involves a daily walk in Christ, a daily surrender of self, as we meet again and again our impulses. As we resist through the power of God we replace the old impulses and drives with new ones that are in harmony with the righteousness of God. By regular attendance to the meetings that continue to present Bible truths, support is gained by allowing the Holy Spirit to bring about a transformation of our hearts and life.

There are only *two powers* in the Universe, the Power of God, and that power which God has allowed Satan to possess and manipulate. When we give our "will," "volition", or "power to choose" to a power, it is either to Jesus Christ the Divine Son of God or to Satan; there are no other powers. If we have chosen some power outside of Jesus Christ as our "Higher Power," or "God of my understanding," we have chosen by default Satan.

Through a process of repentance and confession a person brings to light his hidden faults. These faults that have involved others are made right; there are other wrongs that only God is to receive confession about. It is offensive to God to have man divulge every aspect of his life to another human. We are to be our own conscience, not to allow others to decide for us what is right or wrong. Wrong use of confession has given Satan great influence over mankind for millennia.

To summarize the experience of participating in the program conducted by Underground Oasis I will place below, words presented to the participants concerning prayer as a part of delivery and overcoming.

The commitment has been made. The line has been crossed. We have chosen to get right and not be left behind. We've realized through our past that we are unable to care for our self with the knowledge and will power we have, let alone be guided by it. We've decided to turn our will and life over to the care of God as He reveals Himself to us.

Now our daily task is to ask God for guidance and power to achieve the peace, serenity and love we have always searched for but were never able to attain. We

receive this through personally inviting our Lord and Savior to take control of our life. We ask to be molded; forgiven and accepted, by studying God's Word. Believing it, achieving to it and relying on it, reveals God's will for our new life with Christ. We start to realize we are special and have a purpose. We can be sure that God desires a blessing for us. We start to act on this knowledge and pray for the power to carry it out. As our new life with Christ begins, we realize that many of our old thoughts and habits, including our compulsions and addictive behaviors, do not automatically vanish all at once. What has happened is that from God's viewpoint, we have been forgiven and now have a right to enter into His presence. We now have the right to ask Him for the power needed to begin the complete regeneration and transformation of every part of our lives... The power needed to change every area of life that falls short of Christ's glorious idea of how we can live for Him.

If the God we serve was capable of Creating the universe, earth and man, if he is capable of re-creating man and raising him from the dead and giving him eternal life, is He not also able to give us deliverance—freedom from sin and bondage? We trust Him to redeem us, to translate us to heaven, but when it comes to seeking deliverance from the results of a sinful nature with its bondage and slavery we tend to look to man's programs and not to the power of the Creator of the Universe.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if ye continue in my word, (then) are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8: 31, 32)