

Addicted to drugs,
I yearned to end my life.
Then I found Mercy.

By Amy Lambert
as told to Laura Christianson

'DELIVER ME'

I sat on my bed, carving slash marks into my leg with a razor blade as I listened to a song called "Suicidal Dreams." I was 10 years old. "I'm going to make Dad and Mom pay for what they've done to me," I murmured.

My parents had just gotten divorced, and my dad moved to another city. Our family was broken—and so was I.

On the outside, we appeared to be the perfect pastor's family. But within the privacy of our home, it was like the *Twilight Zone*. I was constantly walking on eggshells around my short-fused dad, who was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Sometimes I'd smart-mouth him and he wouldn't react. Other times, he'd fly into a rage for no apparent reason.

And now it had come to this: My parents' divorce, and my angry, broken heart. I pleaded with God, "You said that if I had faith the size of a mustard seed, you'd move mountains. Please, put my family back together."

It didn't happen. Convinced God had forsaken me, I changed my prayer to, "Just kill me."

To punish my parents for the hurt they'd caused me, I chose the thing I was sure would upset them the most: drugs.

Boys from school gave me my first pain pills. From then on, it was a quick downward spiral. By 13, I'd taken cocaine, tripped acid, smoked marijuana and hash. The drugs not only helped me escape from hurting, they also helped voice the rebellion in my heart.

When I was 15, a 50-year-old drug dealer introduced me to the narcotic pain medication, "oxycotton," a street name for OxyContin. He gave me handfuls of pills, but soon expected something in return for the free drugs. I wasn't willing to give him what he wanted, and he dropped me. So I started selling drugs to support my habit.

After barely graduating high school, my boyfriend and I did anything to get money for drugs. One night, when we were desperate and destitute, he said, "I have a pack of syringes in the bathroom. If you shoot up, you'll feel it more."

I went outside and paced. Twelve years earlier, I'd responded to an altar call at church. But once I started doing drugs, I'd turned my back on God. Torn, I uttered a rare and half-hearted prayer: "Dear God, what am I doing?"

I decided to shoot up.

Months later, my boyfriend was arrested. I approached my parents, and they agreed to help me try to beat my addiction.

It wasn't easy. One day, I ran into the same drug dealer who'd given me oxycotton when I was 15. "Do you want to go get high?" he asked.

Unable to resist the temptation, I shrugged and said, "Sure."

We traveled together, living in crack and heroin houses, shooting up 20 to 30 times a day.

Deliverance

During the worst part of my addiction, my mother sensed the Lord urging her, "Take authority over Amy's addiction and help her break it." God also challenged her to thank him in advance for my deliverance and also for my future ministry.

One day when I showed up at my mom's house, high on drugs, she informed me, "Amy, you are delivered."

I thought she was crazy.

Not long after that, my brother invited me to church. Angry with God but reluctant to hurt my brother's feelings, I agreed. During the service, I felt as if the pastor was speaking directly to me. Afterward, a lady came up to me and said, "The Lord wants you to know that this service was just for you."

My brother took me out for lunch, and another woman approached our table. "The Lord prompted me to share my testimony with you." She told us about how God spared the life of her son, a heroin addict who'd nearly died of an overdose. "God has a plan for you," she said, pointing at me. "A special plan."

I didn't know how to respond.

Later that day, I sat in my car, staring at the sky. For the first time, I felt hope. But I was so severely addicted that I pulled out my needle and my spoon and shot up.

Months later, sprawled on the bed in a run-down motel, I drank a bottle of liquor, smoked a joint, and took a hand-

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Rebellious Heart: Amy during her addiction years.

ful of pills. When I shot up, I completely missed the vein in my arm and it swelled to the size of a grapefruit. Panicked, I called my mom and begged her to take me to the hospital, where they had to operate on my arm.

After my surgery, a woman I'd known from childhood visited me. She handed me a Care Bear, saying, "You can cast all your cares on God because he cares about you." When she asked if she could pray for me, I nodded mutely.

Her prayer shattered the walls around my heart. Overwhelmed, I began to cry.

"Do you want to receive Jesus?" she asked me, her voice gentle.

I was 19 years old and knew I had nothing to lose. "Yes."

Loved through my mess

Though my heart had changed, I still struggled. Every time the church doors were open, I'd be there, crying out to God, "Please, deliver me from my addiction!"

My parents had heard about Mercy Ministries—a Christian residential program for young women seeking to overcome addictions—and they urged me to apply. Three months later, I was accepted.

Laura Christianson, author of *The Adoption Decision* and *The Adoption Network*, lives in Snohomish, Washington.

They said they'd try to have a bed for me in two months.

Two months seemed an eternity. I often sat with a razor blade to my wrist, yearning to end my life. I cut into my flesh, but not deep enough to kill myself. I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

Days later, Mercy called. "Amy, a bed has opened up in our Louisiana home. Can you be here in two weeks?"

I packed and headed for Louisiana. The night before I entered the program, I sat on the floor of my motel room and shot up. When I walked through the doors of Mercy Ministries, I was high.

At Mercy, all 20 residents were immersed in God's Word for much of the day. After waking up at 7:00 A.M. and doing chores, we'd read from *God's Creative Power*, a book that turns Scripture into confessions. We wrote our confessions and concerns—bad things we believed about ourselves. I had pages, the most common: "No one will be able to see me for me; they'll only see my past."

After breakfast, we had praise and worship time, where we'd discuss our daily Bible reading. A pastor, staff member, or guest speaker taught a class, and afterward we'd write what we learned and discuss it. We had daily recreation, regular counseling sessions, and evening classes. Lights-out was at 10 o'clock.

Though my time at Mercy was exactly what I needed, it was difficult. After spending years taking care of myself, I hated being constantly supervised, and I whined about being treated like a child. They told me when and how much I had to eat. I even had to ask permission to go to the restroom at church—and someone had to accompany me.

During my daily prayer times, I'd lie

MINISTRY OF MERCY

The years Nancy Alcorn (center) investigated child abuse cases, supervised foster care, and worked at a correctional facility for girls ignited a passion for helping broken young women find healing.

Issues such as self-harm are pervasive in today's society, says Alcorn. One in every 200 teen girls regularly practices self-abusive behavior, and up to 10 million teens have eating disorders.

In 1983 Alcorn founded Mercy Ministries (mercyministries.org), a nonprofit organization designed to stop the destructive cycles of women aged 13 to 28. Mercy Ministries' primary focus is a free, six-month residential program in which women who face life-controlling issues receive biblically-based counseling, nutrition/fitness/life-skills education, and aftercare planning assistance.

"Most experts don't talk about freedom—they talk about coping," says Alcorn. "But Jesus is not about behavior

Nancy Alcorn founded Mercy Ministries 25 years ago to bring hope and healing to hurting young women.

modification; he's about transformation. We talk about how you can let go of your identity as a person bound by an addiction and become a new person in Christ.

"Your past does not have to destroy your future," she adds. "You can use your past to give someone else a future when you get on the other side of it."

The four books in Alcorn's "Mercy For" series—*Cut*, *Starved*, *Violated*, and *Trapped*—speak directly to girls who engage in self-harm, have an eating disorder, or live with sexual abuse or addictions. With accompanying workbooks, they examine the causes behind the behavior, explain how to permanently break free of self-destructive cycles, and share testimonies from women who now live with joy and freedom.

Mercy Ministries now has facilities in Nashville, St. Louis, and Monroe, Louisiana with 11 more locations planned worldwide.

—LC

Courtesy of MERCY MINISTRIES





Running for Life: Amy (left) participates in a half marathon to benefit Mercy Ministries.

the Mercy staff because I realized they had my best interests at heart.

As time passed I grew to tangibly feel the love and peace of God. I'd never felt worthy enough to come to him on my own. But I learned that I am his daughter, I'm full of value, and he has a plan for my life. Most important, I learned to believe that God has a hope and a future for me.

on the floor and cry. When everything in me wanted to call a drug dealer to come and pick me up, I'd remind myself, *Amy, it's either this or you die.*

My counselor was tough on me. When I tried to be deceptive, she'd immediately call me out. When I had a meltdown three months into the program, she didn't get upset or angry; she loved me right through my mess.

When I'd first arrived, I was so malnourished from my diet of drugs, doughnuts, and soda that I looked like a dead person. During my first four months, I ate balanced meals and gained 50 pounds. Horrified at my lack of control over my body and assuming the Devil had made me gain all that weight, I hysterically sobbed to my counselor, "I'm wasting this program's money and time."

She looked me in the eye and replied, "Yes, you are. You're like Jacob; you're wrestling with God and he's kicking your butt. You might as well do us all a favor and submit to God."


That was my breaking point. I finally figured out that trusting God was my biggest issue. When I began submitting to him, it wasn't difficult to submit to

Dreams awakening

My 11 months at Mercy Ministries was all about God pouring himself into me. During the three years since I graduated from the program, God has been showing me how to pour myself into other hurting and broken people.

I was accepted to the St. Louis Dream Center, an inner-city ministry academy. I currently serve on the leadership team, and I'm a resident advisor in the dorm. We feed the homeless, clean up neighborhoods, do street evangelism, bring roses to prostitutes, and host outreach events for children and the elderly.

Last summer, I ran a half marathon to help support Mercy Ministries. It was quite an accomplishment, considering my body used to be wrecked with drugs. As I ran, I prayed, "Let each step I take be for another young lady's life to be transformed."

Now, at age 24, I realize the plan and purpose God has for my life: to take what I have freely received and give it to others in need. I used to be angry at God for not letting me die; now I am so thankful for a chance to truly live. 

Courtesy of AMY LAMBERT