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BATTLE WITH THE BOTTLE

Pastor Richard Mau

INTERVIEW Part 1

MAU: Noel, thanks for being with us today. Often the first thing people think of when they hear the word Alcoholic is a picture of someone destitute on the street. Can you describe what alcoholism meant for you?

NOEL: From memory I got drunk for the first time when I was 14 and from that time on I wrestled with using alcohol in a responsible way- regularly over-drinking. For many years I functioned very effectively on the outside as a person while wrestling with an addiction underneath and that's the thing with alcoholism. Most alcoholics are functioning in a job, very responsible high paid jobs in some situations, and yet they're wrestling with this addiction.

MAU: If someone was observing you in that time of your life what would they have seen?

NOEL: My battle with alcohol sort of had two phases. There was the one where I really wasn't aware that I had a problem or didn't even want to own up, so some one watching me in that period of life would have seen me drinking often, always having a beer in my hand at any occasion, but I did know that I drank more than other people and so I would kind of sneak a few extra drinks so that I could get the feeling without being obvious in front of people that I was drinking as much as I was. So I would limit what they would see. A lot of people had no idea that I really had a problem with it.

In the second phase where I knew it, I kind of drank secretly and that was quite insidious when I look back to it, but I didn't drink often in front of people then because I tried to say that I was free of it but I wasn't.

MAU: During these two phases what sort of excuses did you use?

NOEL: When you're struggling with alcohol, anything becomes an excuse to take another drink. The obvious ones are you're having a bad day, you're tired, you're stressed, but also times of celebration. You know, when it's your birthday or something good happened at work or in another person's life. Then it's "Hey, it's time to have a drink!" Any occasion becomes an excuse for a drink. You fool yourself into drinking more because you think, "Hey. I'm not really that drunk. It's not hurting me. I can handle this. While you're under the influence you think you can handle anything but it's the next day you realise you couldn't handle it.

MAU: So how did you finally come to the point of admitting that you were in fact, an alcoholic?

NOEL: I grew up with a distorted view of being a man was to be able to drink, and drink a lot. So, when I wasn't aware that I had a problem, drinking was fun. It was enjoyable. It was relaxing. I really looked forward to having a lot of drinks and hanging out with friends or doing whatever it was that I was doing. As I became aware of some marks of an alcoholic it frightened me to see that when I would read some of those indicators, such as-

- ✚ Once I started drinking I couldn't stop- I had a desire to keep drinking and drinking and drinking
- ✚ I noticed that I wanted to keep drinking when others had stopped and went to the coffee to get the same impact.
- ✚ I was noticing there was a mood change. I was a different person.
- ✚ There were times when I'd wake up in the morning and I'd feel really depressed and defeated

- ✚ It wasn't supplying or doing what it used to do and I needed more and more to drink to get the same impact

MAU: Noel, what made you finally decide to do something about your addiction?

NOEL: I think at the heart of all of it was God and His Spirit at work in me, wanting to bring this to a head so that I would do something in my life. But it was also a combination of the consequences of drinking a lot, starting to show up

Always short of money.

I was losing a lot of time because I was drinking earlier in the afternoon, not getting any work done at night, particularly when I was studying,

I was waking up in the morning feeling very depressed and tired and my wife was concerned, so there was some conflict over the amount I was drinking causing those problems.

So they were all starting to add up... As well, I believe God's Spirit was speaking into me, highlighting that this really was now a problem that I needed to face up to.

MAU: So what steps did you take to follow up that desire?

NOEL: The first step was to admit to myself that I had a problem. The second was to let other people know, so in my case I began with my wife. I also then shared with another person who was an alcoholic and he said he'd been noticing that as well. For a while then I managed to work without drinking but I'm sorry to say a cycle went on for quite a few years where I was not drinking and then I would have a binge and then I would stop, and then I would have a binge. I would try and share with other people. I even tried AA meetings. I found it really hard to connect there but I know other people have been helped enormously so I'm not against them. In the end it was, I think, God finally breaking my spirit. I was powerless. I didn't know what to do and I finally shared again with some people who really graciously heard me out and prayed for me. But I did also one other thing. I developed a prayer partner relationship with someone who kept me accountable every week and asked me "have you had a drink?" that was eventually the road that got me out of it.

In conjunction with sharing with others that I had a problem and I wanted to stop, I had to do some work on me to actually remove some of those deep things in me that would often be trigger points to me drinking. And I think any pathway for a person to stop drinking is that there are usually some unresolved issues underneath that need to be dealt with- whether it's through counselling or whatever it is, but we usually have issues of insecurity or hurts there, that have fed the need to drink. Drink was a learned behaviour to deal with that. Just because we remove the drink, doesn't mean the problem's not there and it can come out in other ways. So, it's really important that it's not just stopping the drink but to getting beneath it and finding out what are some of the issues that were leading you to drink.

MESSAGE

MAU: We've been talking with Noel about his journey with alcoholism. There's a parable in the Bible that offers both insight and hope to lasting recovery. In the Bible, Jesus, the son of God, shared the story of the prodigal son. The young son demanded his inheritance before his father's death and then lived a lifestyle of "eat, drink and be merry". In other words there was freedom without responsible control.

The money was soon gone and the son became desperate. In his state of helplessness and hopelessness, he chose to return home. As Jesus shares, "when he came to his senses," this wayward son recognised his need to confess his sins to his father. His expectations were low, his desperation high. He thought his father might at least let him be "one of his hired men."

But then comes the surprise. When this lost son returned home, the father was there to greet him. He celebrated his son's return.

This story as told by Jesus offers a picture of God the Father who welcomes anyone who has wandered from him. In regard to recovery, God is there to say to every prodigal "welcome home"

You and I are welcomed back into the loving arms of the father. You can draw the strength you need from the forgiveness that is yours because of what Jesus has already done for you. He died a painful death upon a cross so that our sins could be forgiven.

The prodigal son story is an outline of addiction and recovery! First there was the fall into the addictive lifestyle, then the portrayal of hope when a life is turned around. And at the centre is the key to successful recovery, tied to the following points:

Admit there is a problem

Believe that hope is found in God

Confess one's sins to God and one other person

Dedicate one's life to reconciliation and relationship building – with God, others and yourself

Extend love and hope to others in need of guidance and hope

INTERVIEW Part 2

MAU: Well Noel, you've lived through these stages of recovery. How has your view of life changed since facing up to your addiction?

NOEL: Since being alcohol free for a few years now, the way I view myself has dramatically changed. Every time I gave in and drank I would feel defeated and go into a cycle of beating myself up. It's just a total release and joy in some way of not having to wake up in the morning and going "Oh no, I've blown it again". "Cause I lived with that cycle for years. I just didn't **stop** drinking. I'd succeeded, failed, succeeded, and failed. The cycle went on for ages. But since then, to be free of that is an incredible thing. It's taken me some time to learn to be involved in all those things in life that I used to be involved with that had alcohol- to now be a part of them without drinking - Holidays, Christmas, festivities, parties. But I've actually discovered that I don't need alcohol to be a part of that to actually enjoy myself. That's been a learning journey, but it is possible. When I share with people who ask for help, I say, "You can do it! You don't need the alcohol. You can still have a lot of fun in life!"