

To Connect. To Thrive.

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

January 11, 2026

Eleven and a half years ago, my family and I went on our first and only cruise. It was meant to last for seven days. We got off the ship on the third day due to an injury my husband sustained. No, he was not drunk.

I got to know two other women on that cruise. Like me, they were members of Alcoholics Anonymous, and our connection was lifesaving. I might not have been standing here in front of you without our connection.

We met each day from 12-1pm in a small, dimly lit room off the dining area. The three of us spilled our hearts out during that hour—well, mostly I spilled my heart out—and they listened with compassion, genuine care, and love. I was five years sober at the time, and thought I had it all figured out. These women knew otherwise. They knew I was at a precarious time in my sobriety, because it had been just long enough for me to think I could do this all on my own, alone.

Though we only spent three hours together, I remember these women, their smiles, and warm faces like it was yesterday. One of them was from Manhattan and the Bronx. We had different jobs, skin colors, and economic realities. But we had one thing in common. We were all alcoholics who have found a way to live a life beyond our wildest dreams. We had chosen connection over addiction.

When I entered the rooms of AA 16.5 years ago, I was not a minister. I lived a life that looked great on the outside, making more money than ever before in my career while running my own business. I loved people but also felt isolated and alone inside myself, struggling with the early stages of an addiction that took my mother's life, as well as the life of both her mother and father.

I went to one liquor store one day and another the next, hoping the clerk wouldn't remember me. I waited until after the business parties to drink more than one glass of red wine and watched my dependency on alcohol deepen. It was scary.

Like Alan shared when he offered his testimonial,

when I walked into the rooms of AA, I found people who were warm, funny, and real. These people didn't pull punches. They were brave and they cared sincerely about other people in a way I had never experienced before.

We talked about things that mattered in life, like our thought patterns, gratitude, and service—not our jobs, degrees, or type of car we drove (if we did drive a car). My AA friends quickly became my tribe, and many of them still are part of it.

The biases against addicts, so prevalent even today, sadden me. In my experience, addicts in recovery are some of the most genuine, honest, and good people I know. And living in the throes of addiction is not fun. It leaves its scars on the lives of everyone involved. Addiction is not a moral failing, and it is certainly not due to a lack of willpower.

The statistics around addictions are staggering, though not surprising. According to data from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 48.4 million people, or 16.8 percent of the American population, have a substance abuse disorder with either alcohol or drugs.¹

Around 1 percent of the adult population has a severe gambling problem, while another 2–3 percent have less severe but still significant issues.² Approximately 6 percent to 8 percent of U.S. adults could be classified as addicted to sex³,

1 “SAMHSA Releases Annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” SAMHSA, July 28, 2025, [https://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/20250728/samhsa-releases-annual-national-survey-on-drug-use-and-health#:~:text=Among%20people%2012%20or%20older%2C%2016.8%25%20\(or%2048.4%20million,MAUD\)%20in%20the%20past%20year.](https://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/20250728/samhsa-releases-annual-national-survey-on-drug-use-and-health#:~:text=Among%20people%2012%20or%20older%2C%2016.8%25%20(or%2048.4%20million,MAUD)%20in%20the%20past%20year.)

2 “FAQs: What Is Problem Gambling?,” The National Council on Problem Gambling, <https://www.ncpgambling.org/help-treatment/faqs-what-is-problem-gambling/>.

3 “Does society have a sex addiction prob-

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while 6 percent are addicted to shopping.⁴

Ten percent of Americans are addicted to work.⁵ And, in 2023, 57 percent of U.S. adults considered themselves “addicted” to their cell phones.⁶

My friends: those statistics tell us that 42 percent of Americans are either addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, shopping, or work. Yes, some people have multiple addictions and may be counted more than once. And how many people are struggling with addictions in any of these areas and are not included in those percentages?

If we include addiction to our cell phones, 99 percent of Americans are addicted to some activity or substance—or both.

I believe that all of us are also addicted to fear. How could we be otherwise in this fast-paced, fear-based time with elected officials whose actions are corrupt, and when violence is far too

lem?” Mayo Clinic Health System, November 2, 2022, <https://snscs-prod-external.mayo.edu/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/does-society-have-a-sex-addiction-problem#:~:text=Sexual%20addiction%20facts,men%20in%20self%2Dhelp%20groups>.

⁴ “Shopping Addiction Statistics,” AddictionHelp.com, last updated October 19, 2025, <https://www.addictionhelp.com/shopping-addiction/statistics/#:~:text=Research%20on%20shopping%20addiction%20is,in%20the%20US%20general%20population>.

⁵ “Work addiction and personality organization: Results from a representative, three-wave longitudinal study,” Comprehensive Psychiatry, Science Direct, Volume 134, October 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010440X24000646#:~:text=Work%20addiction%20can%20be%20studied,as%2039.7%25%20in%20Eastern%20countries>.

⁶ How many people are addicted to their phones?,” Consumer Affairs Journal of Consumer Research, updated March 25, 2024, https://www.consumeraffairs.com/cell_phones/how-many-people-are-addicted-to-their-phones.html.

common? This has been a difficult year already, and it comes on the heels of other difficult years with this presidency, Covid, and so much more. People on the Addiction Ministry Team tell us that they couldn’t cope if they weren’t smoking dope. We fear that more and more people are looking to substances or actions that will provide them with relief from all of what is going on in our country. What gives you relief? Is it life giving, fear reducing, and in service to yourself and others?

There is no shame.

Addiction, like loneliness, is a national epidemic; connection is a critical part of the solution. AA, like this church and many other groups, is founded on connection.

The most healing connections do not just intensify the fear we are all living amongst. The most healing connections offer hope, humor, service, and love. These connections are ways that we can know we are not alone and where we can think about other people. Healing connections are soothing and often challenge us to think differently, be open-minded, and willing to learn. Healthy connections leave us feeling better, not worse, and support our honest and healthy self-development.

Twelve-step programs also have the best slogans. They are simple, but not always easy, and they work.

First things first. Comparing leads to despairing. Do not compare your insides with someone else’s outsides. One day at a time. Easy does it. And reach out your hand for help.

And so may we be blessed with healing connections, and may we be a blessing to others in all that we do.

Amen.

Please reach out to me or any member of the Addiction Ministry Team if you are struggling or a loved one is struggling with addiction or the effects of addiction. We are here to connect and help connect you with others.