

## **“God, if you are real, get me out of this mess,” pleaded “seasoned prisoner” with 20-year addiction**

By Gracia Lee via saltandlight.sg



Caption: Violet Lim spent 20 years ensnared in the bondage of a drug addiction, but overcame it at halfway house The Turning Point after discovering a relationship with God. Photo by Gracia Lee.

Violet Lim was just a little girl when tragedy struck, twice.

At 11, her family received a cold, factual telegram informing them that her father, who was a sailor, had disappeared while at sea. His body was never found.

To cope with the sudden loss of the family’s sole breadwinner, her illiterate mother had to relinquish her role at home and labour as a washerwoman to support her four young children.

Left to fend for themselves, Lim and her older brother, who were particularly close, found comfort in each other’s company. But even this comfort was short-lived.

Two years later, Lim's brother fell sick with a high fever. In less than a week, he was dead. He was 14 and she, 13.



**Caption:** Young Lim (extreme left) with her family, including her father (second from right) and older brother (second from left) who died suddenly within two years of each other. Photo courtesy of Violet Lim.

Lim was changed by her grief.

“I just came to this conclusion that life is so transient, so unpredictable. So, since the passing of my late brother, I had this philosophy to live life as if there’s no tomorrow,” Lim, now 62, told *Salt&Light*.

It was this mindset, formed on the cusp of her teenage years, that eventually led her to drop out of school in Secondary 4 and into bad company.

At 16, longing to be accepted and spurred by curiosity, she had her first puff of ganja (cannabis) – the first step into the insidious snare of a 20-year drug addiction, half of which would be spent behind bars.

## “I felt so dirty”

Due to the stigma attached to being a female drug addict, few are willing to share their stories of struggle and even recovery.

Though Lim is not exempt from these feelings of shame, she is emboldened by God’s Word, which declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ([Romans 8:1](#)).

“When I look at my past, I feel so ashamed and I feel so ugly. I feel so dirty. But knowing that God – the Almighty, the All-powerful – loves me for who I am, that brings tremendous comfort to me,” she said.

She hopes that her story can testify to God’s goodness and love, and be a “beacon of hope” to those who feel trapped and unreachable in their addiction.

After all, she has fully experienced the drowning desperation and helplessness that a drug addiction can bring.

## Drugs in the toilet

When she began experimenting with drugs, first with cannabis and later with harder drugs like heroin, Lim said she was a naive teenager ignorant of its harmful and addictive effects.

“I never imagined myself to be hooked one day. So, by the time I realised that drugs could be so addictive, it was too late,” she said.

Describing it as a “bondage”, she recalled her life revolving around her need to satisfy her drug cravings.

She slept in the day and went out at night, spending her nights at a discotheque, where she worked, and doing drugs in toilet cubicles.



Caption: Lim during her days working at the discotheque, where she spent her nights abusing drugs in toilet cubicles. Photo courtesy of Violet Lim.

Apart from the high she experienced, she also felt a sense of belonging with her friends, who all came from similar backgrounds and seemed to understand her pain.

Anything that would help her get her fix, she did without a thought.

“I had no qualms about hooking up with some guy as my boyfriend just to live off his drugs,” she said. “In my later years, I stole from my family – my sister and late mom.”

As she burrowed deeper and deeper into addiction, she soon found that she could not function without drugs. If she tried to wean herself off for just a day, she would be too sick to even get out of bed, she said.

## Broken promises

The only times she was sober was when she was thrown behind bars.

A self-described “seasoned prisoner”, Lim was arrested seven times for drug-related offences. In all, she spent a combined length of 10 years in prison and the drug rehabilitation centre (DRC).

Each time she found herself in a cell, she would promise herself that it would be the last time. But the moment she left prison, she would plunge right back into her old lifestyle.

Once, it took all of one month before she found herself back behind bars again.

“It’s a vicious cycle, knowing the consequences of using drugs – you know you’ll be arrested and sent back to prison or the DRC – but somehow you are trapped and you don’t know how to get out of it,” she said.

“For most of us drug addicts, it’s not just about giving up drugs per se, but you actually have to give up everything – your friends, your life, and start all over again. And that is the most difficult part.”

## Are you there, God?

In 1995, after two decades of addiction, her older sister finally gave her an ultimatum:

“Either get yourself cleaned up, or we will call the police on you and disown you.”

Up until that point, Lim’s family had been kind to her, never once denying her from coming home despite her state. “So, when my older sister said something like that, I knew she was serious about it,” Lim said.

It was a wake-up call that forced her to start thinking more deeply about her life.

“I eventually realised that my addiction would lead me either to death or to a life spent in prison. And I didn’t want my life to end in either way,” said Lim.

Yet she recognised that she was utterly unable to help herself.

In her desperation, she remembered the God that she had been introduced to in prison by volunteers who had come in to conduct Sunday services.

Though she had paid close attention to the messages, she had always felt too overwhelmed by shame to come to God personally.

“I thought that I would be a hypocrite to pray and ask God for help if I wasn’t prepared to give up my lifestyle to follow Him.

“I thought that I wasn’t good enough for God, that I could never be good enough for God. It was always this guilt that made me stop drawing close to Him.”

But this time, realising she had really reached the end of herself, she cried out to Him in a simple prayer: “I’m so sick of my life. I don’t want to continue using drugs, but I can’t stop.

“God, if you are real, get me out of this mess.”

## Finding grace

Soon after that, Lim’s sister suggested she check herself into a halfway house. It was then that Lim remembered The Turning Point, a Christian halfway house in Singapore for women that one of her friends had enrolled in before.

“As I look back, I can see God’s hand working in my life. God used my sister as a mouthpiece to lead me to The Turning Point,” said Lim, adding that it was there that she grew deeper in her knowledge of God.

Though she had always lived her life with the sole purpose of enjoyment, being at the halfway house made her deeply examine the way she had been living.

Burdened by existential questions of the purpose and meaning of life, she began to seek God earnestly in the wee hours of the morning, rising at 5am to pray and pore over the Bible.

And in the pages of God’s Word, she found life-transforming grace.

“I realised that I don’t have to do anything, I don’t have to try to be good before God accepts me for who I am – that’s what grace is all about. I’m not deserving of God’s love but God still loves me,” she said.

This unconditional love was further demonstrated by those at the home – founders Florence Ng and Khew Swee Ling, as well as the volunteers who journeyed with her and encouraged her when she wanted to throw in the towel and quit the programme.





Caption: Lim experienced God's love through the care shown to her by the Christian volunteers at The Turning Point, who readily accepted her despite knowing about her past, she said. Photo by Gracia Lee.

“The shame of my past was the biggest hindrance in my life. I was so afraid of people knowing about my past. Would they accept me for who I am? That terrified me.

“But these people, they knew my background, they knew where I had been, yet they were so open to receiving me as a sister-in-Christ.

“I didn't have to do anything to prove myself. That's how I knew God's love, through the lives of these Christian friends who came alongside to support me.”

## God's greater purposes

As she persevered in the programme, Lim was also struck by founders Ng and Khew, who had given up their lives to serve addicts like her, as well as the volunteers who turned up every week without fail.

“Very often I asked myself, why would these people spend so much time coming here to befriend us? What is this thing that, rain or shine, they will still be there for us?”

“We are a very difficult group of people. It’s not easy to get along, and a lot of times we don’t appreciate your help, yet these people are willing to lay down their lives to support us in our journey of recovery.

“What gave them the passion to work with people like me? Why would they do something so time-consuming?”

The answer she soon realised? “God’s love,” Lim said simply. “It’s a love that translated into hope for us.”

It inspired her to see past her current struggle, to hope that one day God could use her for His greater purposes too, she said.

## From helplessness to hope

More than two decades later, Lim is finally living out this hope.

After completing the programme, she stayed on at The Turning Point to work as an administrator. Today, she is a case worker who journeys with women like herself who are struggling to break free from the bondage of addiction.

“To me, my recovery was a miracle because I loved drugs and had been very deep in it. Without God, I know for sure that I will not be where I am today,” she said, adding that she is still a work in progress.



Caption: Lim (second from right), who experienced God's love through the people she met at The Turning Point, is now giving her life to serving others. She is pictured here with founder Florence Ng (fourth from right) and the late Felicity Foster-Carter, who was the first DRC volunteer of the Prisons Department. Photo courtesy of Florence Ng.

Her experience has allowed her to empathise with the helplessness that the women at the halfway house feel, while her story serves as a living example to them that change is possible.

“There is hope,” she said. “God can reach down to a person regardless of how deep he or she is in, because that is what happened in my life. God lifted me up from the depths and changed me into somebody beautiful.”

While she still struggles with shame from time to time, she persists in sharing her testimony to glorify the transforming power of Christ, as well as to give hope to addicts like herself and their loved ones.

Above all, she clings on tightly to [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), which proclaims: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Lim said: “Regardless of what I have done in the past, that verse gives me a lot of courage that God has cleansed me of all my sins. I am a new creature. I am a new being, so what’s important is to live out this new being.”

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