

Sometimes in life, there can be a lot of pressure to make it appear to others that our life is in control, and that everything is in order in our lives. Image means a lot. We want people to respect us, to think highly of us. Related to that power can be important, or having financial security. And while in and of themselves such things aren't bad, the question we all have to ask ourselves is where is our heart? Because if our heart is on something or someone other than God, our life will become a house of cards.

A few years back, Doug Tieman, who is the CEO of Caron Treatment Centers, one of the largest and most respected addiction treatment centers in the country, was dealing with such a problem.

"They're going to find out" he thought to himself repeatedly about his secret.

He traveled a lot for his job as CEO of Caron Treatment Centers, one of the largest and most respected addiction treatment programs in the country. Usually alone, which was how he'd managed to keep his secret for so long. His secret was that he was relying more and more on alcohol as a crutch.

There was no way he could keep up the façade the whole time, he thought to himself. Or was there? His wife, Frances, had mentioned that their daughter Teresa would be on spring break from college that same week. So he invited Teresa to join him. With her around, he thought he wouldn't slip up. He'd stay at the top of his game.

Looking back, Doug thinks perhaps he put so much pressure on himself to achieve at the highest level because he'd come from such humble beginnings. He'd grown up on a pig farm in Missouri, the oldest of five sons. Baling hay, feeding slop to the family's pigs, hitting the books, going to church—that's how he'd spent his childhood. His family and faith had taught him the value of hard work and service. He'd been the first in his family to graduate from college, and his father had encouraged him to "reach for the moon." He'd set an ambitious goal for himself: becoming CEO of a nonprofit organization before the age of 40.

Doug says he was fortunate that his background in business and fundraising led him to a development executive position at Hazelden, another well respected addiction treatment center here in Minnesota. Caron hired

him in 1995 as its president and CEO. The small-town farm boy had made it big.

Caron was struggling financially when Doug took over, and he was determined to get the center back on track. By 2008, total revenues had quintupled to \$60 million and fund-raising numbers were at an all-time high. The board of directors was impressed, the employees were happy and Doug was respected in the addiction treatment field.

But success had come at a cost. The higher Doug rose, the harder he worked. And the more he turned to alcohol to manage his stress.

Doug had taken his first drink during his freshman year of college. He says he liked the taste, the buzz. He liked how it made him feel. He wasn't the insecure kid fresh off the pig farm anymore. He could do anything!

Oddly, working in addiction treatment made it easy for him to hide his drinking. In his field, he says, alcohol isn't served at business functions, so he didn't have to worry that he'd embarrass himself in front of colleagues. But he looked forward to business trips. They were his time to drink.

The same discipline that served him so well in his career helped him cover up his drinking. His life became completely compartmentalized. If he drank around Frances or his children, it was minimal and in a social context.

Doug rarely drank in their community. Only when he was away on business did the drinking escalate into abuse.

Even then, Doug says he kept things under control. For years, he made deals with himself and stuck to them. "I'll drink on one night of this three-day business trip and one night only" he'd say. During the early 2000s, however, something snapped. Work was going well; he was happily married and an involved father. But for some reason, he couldn't keep his deals with himself anymore.

On business trips, Doug would get drunk every single night. Then he would find himself planning extra trips specifically so he could drink.

He would put in a 14-hour day and unwind at the hotel bar afterward. "I work so hard," he'd tell himself. "I deserve this." Beer was his drink of choice. Doug got to the point where he could throw back 12 in one night,

easy. Alcohol made him feel funnier. Braver. Smarter. He's a social person, and he loved interacting with his fellow bar patrons.

The next morning, he'd wake up queasy. As much from guilt as from his hangover.

To appease his conscience, he worked even harder. He threw himself into being a super CEO, super husband, super dad. He exceeded the center's fund-raising goals. Coached Little League. Built a deck on their house. He thought that drinking actually made him a better leader, husband and father because it pushed him to overachieve. That's how he rationalized it anyway.

On the outside, Doug says his life looked great. On the inside, he was rotting away. His secret ate at his soul. "That is what secrets—and untreated addictions—do" he says. From his work, he knew exactly what was happening to him: the inevitable progression of alcoholism. He knew he needed help, but where could he go? Word would get out that the CEO of Caron was in rehab. Then their organization and the addiction treatment field and, even worse, the recovery of thousands of people would be called

into question. He prayed about it constantly. Even God didn't seem to have a solution, Doug thought.

By the time he went on a weeklong work trip to Florida, Doug was acting from a place of fear. Fear of being found out. Of losing everything he cared about. After dinner with his daughter he said he was going to meet up with a friend. He did, but this was someone, the only one who knew that was drinking heavily. They met at a bar, and five or six beers later, Doug couldn't remember why he'd been so stressed in the first place. By then, his friend had left. Doug kept drinking.

Later that night, Doug got behind the wheel of his rental car and headed back to his hotel.

He'd almost made it when—he struck the wall on the exit ramp.

Blaring sirens. Flashing lights. A police officer got out of his patrol car and walked up.

He was arrested for DUI, but felt strange relief; like he didn't have to hide his secret anymore.

Doug could no longer minimize or deny his addiction. It was real and it was public—with local media even reporting on his arrest. He made the immediate decision to seek treatment. He spent six weeks at a residential treatment center in the desert. "Don't go easy on me," He told his counselor there. "I'll do whatever it takes to hold on to my job and my family."

Just one week in, the chairman of the board of Caron informed him that he was being put on medical leave and that he might not get his job back. Doug's family was understandably also very upset, and he knew it was going to take a lot to regain their trust.

"Now you can understand the definition of being powerless," his counselor said. "The only thing you have power over is your willingness to recover."

It didn't sink in. He kept obsessing about what to do to save his job and his marriage. That's what occupied Doug's mind on his daily jogs in rehab.

One day he was out jogging when he took in the stark beauty of the desert around him, the mountains looming beyond. He felt very small.

Doug says he realized he was powerless. Powerless to keep his job.

Powerless to save his marriage. Powerless to control everyone and everything around him. If he wanted to live and be sober, he would have to let go of his own will and accept the will of his higher power, he told himself. There in the stillness of the desert, Doug asked, "God, let me be a vessel of your good will, wherever that goes."

Recovery remained his priority when he went home. He found a sponsor, went to 12-step meetings regularly. And he began making amends to everyone in his life.

He'd thought his children hadn't been hurt since he never drank around them, that coaching their sports teams and being involved in their activities meant he was a good dad. "You were there, but we didn't want you to be," they said. "You were always angry."

He needed to hear how his behavior had affected them. Getting honest about his addiction allowed him to build honest, healthy relationships with his children and his wife.

On his sixtieth birthday, they invited friends over for a barbecue and to watch the Major League Baseball All-Star Game. At one point, his wife turned to him and said, “Who would have thought such a horrible disease would make our relationship so great?”

That very public DUI in Florida could have ended his career and his marriage, but getting found out turned out to be the best thing for him, something God knew he needed. Through extensive treatment, support and a commitment to recovery, he was blessed with the opportunity to become a better man, one day at a time. A more effective, more understanding leader at Caron. A more open, loving and emotionally present husband and father. Instead of living in fear, today Doug is living in dignity and grace, and he is so grateful.

For this to happen though required coming to terms with the fact that he was going in the wrong direction. That God wasn't the center of his life; rather it was his career and ambition.

Being a Christian requires looking sin square in the face, for we all have sin. The point of our religion is not to just do good deeds. Doug was certainly helping a lot of people. But he was neglecting the bad things going on in his life. As one preacher put it, Fr. Leon Pereria, a Dominican Priest, just as one cannot study theology without faith in God, so too, one cannot live the life of the Spirit while compromising with the spirit of this world, the evil one. We say we want fellowship with Jesus. But sometimes, like a bishop who once got in trouble for a series of adulterous relationships and still believed he was a good pastor, as a parting shot, said “At least I never preached on sexual morality.” Well, he might not have been a hypocrite, but he was worse - he was a spiritual father who failed as a father.

The problem is sometimes, like Doug, we can think “it’s all up to me” and we don’t need God. This lie allows us as humans to accept sin; to conceal it; be it with alcohol like Doug, or reasoning like Doug (I’m doing so much good for others, I’ll work harder, I’m a good dad, It’s just a private thing) that we can become blind. We can look at others as the “real” sinners; the people who are politically opposite of us; those who never come to Mass; those who do “really bad” things. As Christians though, we are called to

something greater - to look sin square in the face like Jesus does, and to reach out to God.

The starting point is admitting we have a problem. All of us have various things we battle. For some it's alcoholism; others are addicted to sins of the flesh and sensualism from the plague of pornography; others it's gossip; others perhaps power or ego; or ambition where we are a workaholic who never has time for family or driving our spouse or kids too hard. We need to own up to what we think about every Ash Wednesday; namely we need ongoing conversion and repentance. Some people blame God; God made me this way, it's His fault. Others blame other people; look what you made me do. Or others blame their work schedule or stress, whatever it might be. We as humans want to shift blame. But while there can be things that make us more prone to sin, we also have to be honest when and where sin is taking over. It comes down to Jeremiah reminding us that if our hearts aren't in God, we are like a barren bush in the desert; standing in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. We can play make believe like Doug, but in the end the secret always comes out.

With this though there is hope. And this is where the balance of mercy and action come into place. Cheap grace would say well hey God will just forgive me so I'll go out and do it again and again. Yes, God forgives seventy times seven. Yes, often our sins are habitual. But God wants us to make an effort. God forgave Doug, but Doug had to come to a point where he had to take the steps to get help. So when we examine our conscience, we look at what's going on, and make the changes. Maybe it means asking for help if we have an addiction. Maybe it means making sure the computer or phone is off or always in a public place. Maybe it means listening when others are alerting us to things like our anger level, or how we are doing as a parent like Doug's kids who told him yeah, you were there but you were always angry, and we need to ask ourselves do I need to make changes in my parenting. Or asking hard questions from people we trust like do you think I gossip too much, or is my language a bit off color, did I hurt your feelings by what I said or didn't say, etc. We might not like the answers, but if we want to truly grow we have to let God's grace shine on those shadows and be truly liberated.

And then lastly, we do that ongoing examination of conscience that says how am I doing. The Beatitudes are a great help in that. We get Luke's version this week in what's called the "Sermon on the Plain."

At face value they seem a little philosophical, but each one has some great depth to helping us grow spiritually. I wish I could take credit for the interpretations, but Bishop Robert Barron has great takes on them. Some of his points:

Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.

Just being poor is no virtue. Rather, think of this as how blessed you are if you are not trusting in wealth. You're not planting your life next to that hopelessly dry stream or hoping in worldly wealth. How blessed are you and lucky you are if you aren't grounding your heart in that reality.

Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied.

This is blessed are you if your heart does not belong to the sensual pleasure of this world. Doug had that problem. When we look at

sensualism, from alcohol to pornography, or other addictions, they can take over a soul.

Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh.

Jesus here isn't glorifying depression. Rather, how blessed you are if you are not grounding your life rooting your life in good feelings. Good feelings are great when we have them, but good feelings come and go. Sometimes we thrive on praise from others and want to feel liked and loved. Other times we turn to things like Doug did to give us fake feelings. Feelings come and go, but some people are addicted to them; like Doug, they'll take any drug to get them; rather we need to be grounded in God who isn't some passing feeling but there for us always.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!

I'm happy if people persecute me? No, just don't plant your heart in honor of the world that world gives. Honor is good but trouble is a lot of is get

addicted to honor. We want attention and likes on Facebook or to be seen and noticed. Or we can be fearful of being “canceled” and not be willing to speak up for the truth. We need humility, and also fortitude when it comes to doing the right thing.

It's not easy being a Christian. God wants us to get to work. But the good news for you and me is He loves us more than we can ever imagine. With God there need not be pretending or image. God sees to our heart. And He wants to continually help us to become the people He knows we can become. He doesn't just want us to show up at Mass and think that's enough, or to think we're working hard here or there or that's enough. Rather, He wants us to daily grow in learning how to live and love Him and our neighbor with our whole heart, mind and soul. Let's strive to make sure our heart isn't divided, but is rather grounded and resting in God, and know that when we acknowledge we all have shadows that the light of grace needs to illuminate, that working with God and letting Him fully take over our hearts we can ultimately with Him get to the final destination of heaven.