

You've heard, "They have to 'hit bottom' before they will get help."

# Why not **Raise the Bottom!**

By Dave Batty

You've heard it said, "They must 'hit bottom' before they will be ready to get help." Do you have to wait until they hit bottom? Or is there something you can do to help "raise the bottom" so your love one can get help sooner?

## **What does it mean to "hit bottom?"**

We often look at a person who has lost everything—job, car, home, respect—often family relationships have been destroyed by broken promises. They "hit bottom" when they are

- ❖ **How do you decide when your help is making a positive impact—moving your love one toward real change?**
- ❖ **If I don't help my loved one—then what will I do if they die?**
- ❖ **What steps can I take to help "raise the bottom" for my loved one who doesn't want to change?**

homeless living on the

streets. They've hit bottom when no one will loan them money to make through their current "crisis"

On ex-addict told me, "Hitting bottom" meant giving up my dignity and self-respect—doing whatever it took to get money for drugs. I even sold my body for a few dollars."

For another young mother on her way to "hitting bottom" it meant losing custody of her children—and still falling deeper into her addiction.

"Hitting bottom" meant I was in so much pain—I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. 'Hitting bottom' meant I was ready to change—to give up on my miserable life and find help."

"Hitting bottom" means facing reality—hitting a hard, painful place—with nowhere else to go.

For some it means be-

ing penniless—hungry—even starving. The pain can no longer be ignored or drowned out with alcohol or other drugs.

"When I finally came to the end of myself and said, 'I need help,' that was the beginning of my road to recovery," shares one

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young man. "I was finally ready to listen to others."

"Hitting bottom" means a person is forced to face the consequences of their irresponsible lifestyle—it is not easy—many are very stubborn. "I had been going blindly down the road to destruction—but convinced it was the best way to go," explained another young man. "I had given up on life—I was so miserable, I wanted to die. 'Hitting bottom' meant I could no longer run from reality. Denial and delusion had

taken me down a dead-end street.”

What is the common trait of those who “hit bottom,” and survive? Pain!

“I was in so much pain, I wanted to die,” shared one young lady here at

***My boyfriend supported my drug habit for over ten years.*** And then he ended up in jail. Always before, I could get a friend to give me money. But now my friends told me to stay away. They didn’t trust me anymore. I had lied to them so many times, they didn’t want to have anything to do with me. I had lost custody of my children. When no one would help me, I finally began to believe that I needed to get help.

Teen Challenge. “The pain helped me face reality—the pain was real—I couldn’t run from it or deny it any longer.”

For those who have “hit bottom” and recovered, that path to restoration is often slow and painful.

“I had to be willing to face my problems—and I had lots of them,” Elisa shared. “When I called my mother from a pay phone, she came and got me off the street and helped me get into Teen Challenge where I found God’s answers to my problems.

“When I first came to Teen Challenge, I was so confused. I rebelled against the staff. I was moody and inconsistent—up one day and down the next. But the staff persisted in showing me love, and holding me responsible for my actions. Slowly the fog cleared from my mind.

“It’s been a painful process—but I am finally getting myself on a solid foundation where I can move toward healthy relationships. I’m learning what it means to take responsibility for my actions, my words, and my feelings.

“I could not have made these changes on my own. It took God’s love and God’s power to change me. When I surrendered my will to Him, that’s when the real changes on the inside started.”

“Hitting bottom” became the turning point for many—but not for all. Some hit bottom and commit suicide. Others end up in prison for life.

So what about your loved one—on the road to destruction—using alcohol or other drugs, or some other destructive behavior? They may be hurting you or the ones you love. What can you do?

Some would say—get out of the way—wait until they “hit bottom.”

A better alternative—we need to find a way to “raise the bottom.”

### **How do we “raise the bottom?”**

#### **1.**

#### **Stop rescuing your loved one**

All too often we have covered up their irresponsible decisions—paid bail so they could get out of jail, paid delinquent bills, or the rent. We’ve believed their heart-stopping stories of tragedy.

“I cashed my check, put the cash in my pocket. When I got home, the money was gone! I must have dropped it.” They play the part so well—the tears, the frustration—“I was trying so hard to be responsible, and now I have nothing.!”

Your heart of compassion goes out to them and you generously give to help them through to the

next paycheck. You failed to see the story was a very convincing con job to get extra cash for drugs. You “raise the bottom” for your loved one by allowing them to face the painful consequences of their irresponsible actions.

## 2. Tell them the truth

You help “raise the bottom” for your loved one by being truthful about their problems. We often have perfect insight in seeing the problems in strangers and other casual acquaintances. But when it is our own family members, we want to believe the best, and we deceive ourselves by saying, “Things really aren’t all that bad. I’m sure things will get better soon.”

You need to speak the truth, not in a torrent of frustration and rage, but firmly so the message is unmistakable. “You have a problem—you need to change—you need help. I can’t change you. I won’t

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*As long as I had money I was not thinking about getting help. But when the money was gone, and no one would let me into their home, I finally was ready to get help.*

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Make any more excuses for you. Help is available, but you must choose to get help.”

Saying it one time usually won’t break through the fog of confusion and delusion. Those who work in the field of additions

often see that it takes 30 or more such messages of truth before the person is ready to admit their need to get help.

## 3. Don’t make decisions for them

Some family members have forced their loved one into a program. Sometimes it works—after a few days in the program they realize they need to change, and stay with this new path to healing and restoration. But a huge majority of people forced into programs leave prematurely, and quickly return to their addiction.

Challenge your loved one to get help. Give them alternatives—speak the truth, but make it clear—

### Son almost starves to death

When a rebellious son wants to leave home, it’s got to be a painful time for the whole family, especially the parents. Clearly this is not the first sign of a problem in this family relationship.

The story told in Luke 15:11-32 shows an arrogant son demanding his share of the family inheritance even before his father dies.

He goes off and lives the party lifestyle until his money runs out. It’s clear

that his friends also abandon him.

He ends up feeding pigs, and the only food he gets is what the pigs leave. In spite of his desperate circumstances no one helps him.

That’s the good news of the story, because this painful mess is finally where he “hits bottom.” “He came to himself”—reality finally gets through his delusion.

He accepts responsibility for his sins, his bad decisions, and decides to change.

The process of restoration starts with his confession of his sin to God and then returning home to seek the forgiveness of his family.

He came back a changed man, free of the rebellious delusion that took him away from home in the first place.

they have to decide to change.

#### 4.

##### **Don't stop their pain**

Many of us can walk away from a stranger who is in pain, homeless, dirty clothes, but when it is your loved one it is not so easy. And pain motivates change.

When we rescue our loved ones and prevent them from experiencing the painful consequences of their irresponsible decisions, we feed their delusion, and extend their path to "hitting bottom." Instead of "raising the bottom," we *lower* "the bottom," making their destructive path even longer.

#### 5.

##### **Start early in life**

Many of the teens and young adults that come to Teen Challenge, addicted to drugs, started their path to addiction even before they were teenagers. Disciplining children is often viewed as taboo, an archaic holdover of past decades—some even call it child abuse.

But proper discipline is not child abuse. I remember when our children were 4 and 5 years old: Their

disobedience resulted in daily discipline. Sometimes my wife and I wondered out loud if the discipline was doing any good. We didn't see rapid change. But as the children grew older—7, 8, 9, years old—we saw them become, not perfect, but more obedient. They learned early in life the painful consequences for disobedience.

Many teens and adults have never learned those lessons; they have experienced the *benefits* of irresponsibility. Mom & dad were always there to rescue them when a crisis came. The sooner in life you start applying proper discipline and consistent boundaries for your children, you "raise the bottom" for their trips down the road of irresponsibility. If your child is 40 years old, you can't go back and change the past, but you can change the future.

#### 6.

##### **Get ready for emotional warfare**

If you begin to "raise the bottom," and make your own loved one face the painful consequences of their actions—with no more offers to rescue them—get ready for a flood of anger. "What kind of a

Christian are you? You are supposed to help people when they have a crisis, especially family!"

Their anger may take the same path as little children when being disciplined, who scream, "I hate you!" If you can't understand their rejection, and cave in to their demands, you only *lower* "the bottom," and prolong their damage.

##### **"Raising the bottom" for our daughter**

Our daughter made a lot of bad decisions regarding friends, and ended up on drugs. We often rescued her, paid bail, gave her money, even though we knew she was buying drugs.

We didn't want her to go back to her life of stealing, but she soon started stealing from us. We finally realized we had to give her a hard choice—get help, or we will press charges and send you to jail.

She moved out, and soon got worse. She called and asked to come home, but we refused. We did not compromise.

Finally, with no place to go, her boyfriend in jail, she was willing to get help, and entered Teen Challenge. It wasn't easy, but we are so glad she is now getting real help.

The words of Jesus on the cross can strengthen

you when harsh words come at you. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

It was very painful for Jesus to do the right thing—to stay on the cross and pay the price for our salvation and healing. Are you willing to take the right path, the painful path, so that you can “raise the bottom” for you loved one?

If you truly love those close to you, then the loving thing to do may be very painful for a season, until your loved one turns from the path of destruction to God’s path to freedom.

### 7.

#### **Don’t try to rush the path to recovery**

Many times we have seen a person come to Teen Challenge and make dramatic progress toward healing and a whole new life. The family is so excited—they haven’t seen their loved one look so good for years! Relationships are restored, past hurts forgiven; joyful tears and smiles replace the hurt, anger and frustrations of the past. We’ve seen families say, “Come home today, all is forgiven.”

They fail to understand that the path to recovery is more than putting on a few pounds, and saying, “all is forgiven.” You need to carefully reinforce the process of restoration being taught your loved one.

#### **A prayer for those with a loved one who has not “hit bottom”**

God, (s)he’s in Your hands! Do whatever it takes to bring my loved one to a point of real change. Break through the delusion. I will not interfere with what You are doing. I trust You, God.

If your addicted loved one is in Teen Challenge, you need to encourage your loved one to stay, and finish the program. That’s not an easy task. Many students at Teen Challenge encounter problems and frustrations and want to leave.

Don’t fall back into your old patterns of rescuing your loved one. They need to learn to face the problems and challenges of each day. They need to become consistent in making responsible decisions.

If you break your leg, and have a cast on it, you don’t break it off after a few days, because of the discomfort of the cast. The cast is restrictive, but it protects you during the healing process. Prema-

turely removing the cast does not speed the healing process.

In a similar way, do not let the promises of your loved one deceive you into taking the short cut on their path to healing. Your

loved one may try to convince you that they are ready to leave, they don’t need this program anymore.

The most valuable help you can give is to require them to finish the program. Many parents or wives have said, “If you leave the program before finishing, you can’t come home. Your loved one is looking for the easy way out of these problems. Don’t join the conspiracy of incomplete solutions.

There is perhaps nothing more painful than watching your loved one self-destruct in the bondage of addiction. God offers freedom to each person, young or old, but He doesn’t force His help on us. You can’t force your love one to get help, but you can “raise the bottom,” so that they come face to face with the reality sooner. It’s a painful process, but “raising the bottom” will bring the benefits of healing so much faster.

## Raising the Bottom

### Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Luke 15:11:32. What were the experiences of the son on his way to “hitting bottom?” (see especially verses 12-16, 30-32)
2. What were the desperate conditions of the son when he “hit bottom?”
3. At the son’s point of “hitting bottom,” it says in verse 16 that no one helped him.
  - a. What is your assessment of the fact that God shows no anger or rebuke towards those who did nothing to help this desperate young man?
  - b. What change occurred in the life of this desperate young man? (verses 17-19)
4. In your life, have you experienced a time when you “hit bottom?”
  - a. What started you on the path of self-destruction?
  - b. What false beliefs were you living with?
  - c. What did it feel like to “hit bottom?”
  - d. Did anyone offer the wrong kind of help which rescued you from the painful consequences of your actions, thus “lowering the bottom,” and making yours a longer path to “hitting the bottom?”
  - e. Did anyone do or say anything that helped “raise the bottom” in your life? Explain.
  - f. How long was the recovery process in your life after you “hit bottom?”
5. Do you have a loved one on a path of destruction that has not yet “hit bottom?”
  - a. What, if anything, have you said or done to try to rescue this person?
  - b. How hard is it for you to let go of this person and let God do whatever it takes to bring your loved one to a place of change?
  - c. What can you do to “raise the bottom” for your loved one?



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