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A table of contents for the *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_cbtj.php

Biblical Solutions to Common Causes of Drug Abuse

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The purpose of this investigation is to discover Biblical solutions to common causes of drug abuse. Rather than examining and attacking the symptoms of drug abuse, this study will endeavor to arrive at Biblical solutions to the initial causes of the abuse. It is assumed that those being counseled are regenerate¹ and desire to conduct their lives by the Scriptures.

Drug abuse is obviously rampant in American society with no indication of a decline. The shocking reality is that significantly little is being accomplished in effectively turning the tide. Though frequently associated with the adolescent age, drug abuse is becoming commonly found among those who have long since passed this stage of life.

Thorough research concerning drugs has been done, especially in the last decade. Volumes of statistics concerning chemical analyses, effects (addictive or nonaddictive; habit forming or non-habit forming; harmful or harmless), and usages by individuals have been compiled by countless institutions. This study will not include such data, nor will it distinguish between legal abuse (over-the-counter drugs, prescriptions, etc) and illegal abuse (drugs obtained by illegal means). It will not deal with alcohol abuse though many if not all of the principles included here could be applied to alcohol related problems.

Major Reasons and Scriptural Solutions for Drug Abuse

There are several major reasons for individuals using drugs in an abusive fashion. These include (1) euphoria, (2) peer pressure, (3) boredom, (4) life-jolting experiences and pressures, and (5) learned behavior. The counselor should initially endeavor to discover the reason or reasons for the abuse and treat accordingly with Scriptural solutions.

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Euphoria

Discussion. Euphoria is an elevation of mood in contrast to depression. Through the mass media, a pleasure-oriented American society has intensified an already natural appetite for feeling good. An otherwise natural desire in the individual has sometimes developed into an insatiable craving to get the best of life at any expense.

Guilt and depression sometimes accompany a lack of being able to experience euphoria. Hearing from peers or other sources of the immediate effect of drugs to alleviate negative feelings, the person begins to experiment with any one of a number of drugs which will bring to him an elevated sense of feeling. "There is no denying the fact that certain drugs can give one a feeling of dizzy excitement, an exaggerated sense of buoyancy."² When an appropriate kind of drug is discovered to meet this need, a habit is often formed. The drug may or may not be addictive in a physical sense, but a psychological dependence may result.

Solution. A dearth of spiritual emphasis in American society has contributed largely to this reason for drug abuse. The counselor should recognize God's solution to filling this void in the counselee's life and provide specific verses and/or principles to meet this need.

Prior to the fall of man into sin, God had provided the perfect environment for man to have total enjoyment of life. God had established boundaries for mankind which were not to be trespassed. Man did indeed trespass and was removed from the perfect environment. Choosing rather to satisfy the natural bodily senses at the sacrifice of obedience to God's standards, mankind invited a problem into this world with which humans are still contending today. That problem is the desire to fulfill the bodily appetites apart from God's laws.

God's design originally was for man to be happy and content. God's provision of a wife for Adam to meet his needs demonstrated this (Gen 2:18). The environment provided for Adam also demonstrated this fact. Not only were the trees pleasant to the sight, but the food was considered good (Gen 2:9). Sorrow and pain were clearly a consequence of man's rejection of God's standards (Gen 3:16-19).

As one looks at God's plan for the future, it becomes clear that God's intent for man is to be totally happy. "And God shall wipe

away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Though man is still living in a sin-cursed world, God promises to the believer enjoyment of life. God expects conformity to His Word and His will as a prerequisite to obtaining this enjoyment. The Old Testament abounds with promises of joyful living (Ps 1:1-3; 16:11; 40:1-3; 119:72, 103; Jer 15:16). The New Testament also frequently promises joy and certain positive elevation of mood to believers (Mt 5:3-12; Jn 13:17; Jas 1:25; Gal 5:22). In each of these references it can be understood that love and obedience to God's Word are primary. The resulting effect of obedience is euphoria. The promise of this state of mind extends to those in the most adverse of circumstances (I Pet 4:13-14; Acts 16:22-25).

The believer does not have to depend upon drugs to bring to him enjoyment of life but can decide every day to obey God to the best of his ability and consequently receive from God all the joy necessary to satisfy his life.³

Peer Pressure

Discussion. Peer pressure is essentially the strong influence exerted by one or more individuals upon another individual to conform to his or their standard of living. This may be positive or negative depending upon the individual or individual's accepted standards. There is a basic need in individuals to be socially accepted.⁴ This desire to be socially accepted by a peer group has often been the cause for individuals to begin taking drugs and then forming habits. Peers will often reject the individual who does not conform to a certain style of living. Intimidation through name-calling and ridicule results in wrong behavioral patterns being established. Few individuals can withstand this pressure and so, in order to be accepted, eventually yield to temptations.

Solution. Friends have a great influence on each other either positively or negatively in respect to God. It is essential that the believer who has been influenced by peers to participate in drugs must recognize these friendships as harmful to his relationship with God. The man who is to be happy is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly (Ps 1:1).

Yielding to temptations as encouraged by others is disobedience to God. In Prov 1:10 the root word *pathah*, translated

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"entice," means to allure or persuade. In context, the enticing is to sinful practices. The believer is commanded not to consent. The root word *'avah*, translated "consent," means to breathe after, i e to be willing to follow. In Prov 1:15 believers are not to walk in the way with them and are to refrain from the paths of life that they take. Frequently the book of Proverbs admonishes the believer to abstain from wrong friends (Prov 14:7; 19:27). The Apostle Paul in I Cor 15:33 warns believers of the dangers of being led astray by wrong companionships. The word translated manners actually means "habits." Bad company corrupts (i e, spoils, ruins, or destroys) good habits.⁵

The counselee should be encouraged to establish friendships which will stir up or encourage him to good works (Heb 10:24). This practice must be established if there is to be victory over the drug habit.

Boredom

Discussion. Boredom is an attitude or state of mind resulting from a monotonous or mechanical manner of living. Restlessness and discontentedness with one's present situation tend to encourage his natural curiosity to search for something more exciting and satisfying. "Many practical-minded observers of the present drug epidemic do not connect it with complex causes in modern society but relate it simply to the boredom of modern suburbia."⁶

The widespread utilization of modern technology in our society has contributed to stifling personal plans and ideas. Personal decisions and achievements are not as valuable and result in individuals sometimes feeling useless. Radio, TV and movies encourage people to be purely spectators rather than participants. Material possessions take precedence over initiative and creativity.⁷ "It is this soul starvation, this loss of personal human values, which is a prime factor, we believe, in the precipitation of epidemics of drug abuse among the young members of society."⁸

Solution. The counselee who has become bored by certain circumstances or by a particular environment must be shown that the Christian life, when lived properly, can bring great satisfaction. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). The Apostle Paul said, "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil 4:11). Being bored with life is to imply that God does not or cannot satisfy. Not being satisfied with what God has given or the circumstances He has allowed is to be disobedient. "Be content with such things as ye have" (Heb 13:5).

The counselee should obey God's command in Eph 5:18 to be filled with the Spirit. This is basically allowing the Holy Spirit to control one's life. Since the verb is the present tense of the imperative mood, it is a continuing obligation for believers.⁹ This yielding to the Holy Spirit results in a fruitful satisfying life in contrast to boredom (Eph 5:19-20; Gal 5:22-23).

The one who has turned to drugs because of being bored with life might well consider what unnecessary habits or values he has adopted which contribute to this attitude. Leisure time should be used constructively. Material possessions are only temporal and it is wrong to get attached to them. The Christian should set his mind on eternal things rather than living just for the present (II Cor 4:18).

Life-Jolting Experiences and Pressures

Discussion. Life-jolting experiences such as (1) death of a relative, mate, or friend, (2) divorce—either of a mate or parents, (3) loss or change of jobs, (4) financial crises, (5) loss of health, or, (6) separation of children, parents, or friends geographically,¹⁰ can bring such overwhelming difficulties in adjustment that one turns to drugs (often prescribed tranquilizers) to cope with them.

Tremendous pressure normally comes on individuals confronted with one or more of these experiences of life. The emotions, the mind, and the body are strained at times, seemingly, to the breaking point. For some, in their opinion, the only sure way of relief is through drugs. Barbiturates and tranquilizers are used commonly, legally and illegally, to produce sleep, relieve tension, and relieve anxiety.¹¹

Solution. The individual who has adopted drugs as a means of coping with calamities of life has neglected God as the source of strength. One would have a very difficult time finding godly men and women recorded in the Bible who did not have major crises in their lives. In most of these instances of crises, it is made clear that they turned in faith and hope to God.

The Psalms frequently make mention of the Lord as the strength for life's situations (Ps 27:1; 46:1; 81:1; 73:26). God promises happiness to those who make Him their strength (Ps 84:5). The Christian who waits on the Lord has the promise of receiving strength from Him (Ps 27:14).

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul, in the midst of great trials, testifies how the Lord strengthened him (II Tim 4:17). The Greek word (*enedunamosen*) meant to empower or enable. Kent¹² states that in contrast to the insufficiency of man, the Lord infused Paul with His power. It must be understood that the

power to face these trials may not rest in the individual, but in God where there is more than enough power. Trials should be opportunities for the believer to realize how inadequate he is and lean upon God's strength for the victory. God will not allow in the life of the believer testing that is too great.¹³ Turning to drugs to handle the pressures of life is not the answer. The answer is turning to God.

Learned Behavior

Discussion. Behavior patterns in children are very closely associated with the parents. "Sociological studies of high school and college youth show that their drinking patterns reflect very closely the patterns of their parents. . . . Parents who drink or smoke are likely to have children who turn to alcohol or some other drug."¹⁴

As much as a child or teen is told that drugs are wrong, the example of the parent or parents always speaks louder. Many parents do little to stop their children's involvement in drugs. Some cannot afford professional counsel while others are too embarrassed to admit their problem and receive the help needed. Some parents do not care and others have even encouraged their children to take drugs.¹⁵

Solution. Though sociologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists would like to put the blame for wrong behavior patterns of the counselee on the parents or other environmental influences, God holds each individual responsible for his actions.¹⁶ The counselee may also have a tendency to blame others for his present actions, but Rom 14:12 and II Cor 5:10 state clearly that he will stand individually before God and give an account of his deeds done in this life. There will be no blame shifting at that time.

The counselee must recognize that not all behavior patterns of others are godly. He must evaluate carefully the habits of others. Ungodly habits are to be rejected. Godly habits are to be adopted. Though others may have an influence upon him, no one can force him to sin (Jas 1:14). All sinful behavior presently in the life must be confessed and forsaken (Prov 28:13).

Vital Principles for Counseling Drug Abusers

The believer who is trying to obtain complete victory over the drug problem in his life may need an extended period of counseling. The counselor should set up counseling sessions according to the need. Two areas ought to be covered in these sessions: (1) sin and (2) hope. Sin is the root cause of drug abuse. Contrary to popular belief, drug abuse is not a social disease. It is

The power to face trials does not rest in the individual, but in God there is more than enough power.

the symptom resulting from sin. Hope must be offered the believer. It may be that others have abandoned hope for him but with God there is hope.

Sin

Body. Many drugs are clearly known to be harmful to the physical body. The Christian does not have the right to abuse his body since it belongs to the Lord (I Cor 6:19). The believer is to magnify God not only in his spirit but also in his body (I Cor 10:31; Rom 12:1). By taking drugs detrimental to the body, the individual ceases to magnify God as he should.

Mind. Certain drugs are known to distort reasoning abilities and are sometimes used for the explicit purpose of covering guilt.¹⁷ God expects all believers to use their mind in a way that is controlled (II Cor 10:5; Phil 4:8). The writer of Proverbs explains about an intoxicating drug which causes one to forget the law and consequently pervert justice (Prov 31:5; 23:29-35).

The conscience, operating as a judge is to be used rightly (Acts 24:16, cf I Tim 4:2; Tit 1:15). The Christian must have a controlled mind and sensitive conscience in order to understand God's Word and thereby make right decisions. A purposeful action resulting in distorting the reasoning ability and/or the conscience is contrary to the Scriptures.

Addiction. It has been proved that some drugs are addictive. Enslaving habits to these kinds of drugs are a violation of the principle found in I Cor 6:12. Instead of self-control as is expected of the believer (Gal 5:23), there is lack of control. The danger of this loss of control of one's action is stated very adequately in Proverbs 25:28.

Government. It is true many drugs used in an abusive fashion are obtained legally, but it is also true many drugs used in an abusive fashion are obtained illegally. God commands the believer to obey the government (I Pet 2:13-15; Rom 13:1-3). Disobedience to God's authority is nothing less than sin.

Whatever excuse or rationale man may give for drug abuse, it involves sin. The counselor must thoroughly discuss sin as the issue and point out the seriousness of sin from God's perspective. Not only does sin separate one from fellowship with God (Ps

66:18), but it can only bring the chastening of God to the believer (Heb 12:6).

Hope

The question may rightfully be asked, "Is there hope for the drug abuser?" The Christian counselor may ask the question in another way. "Is there hope for the sinner?" The counselor who considers the Scriptures authoritative for life and practice may emphatically answer in the affirmative. Though man must recognize the consequences of sin, hope is always available and obtainable to the willing individual.

People who had life-dominating sins such as stealing, drunkenness, adultery, and homosexuality were saved from these sins and were expected to have continuing victory over them (I Cor 6:9-12). God has provided in salvation all that is necessary for this victory (II Pet 1:3-4). As the counselee acknowledges his sin, obedience to God's command to confess and forsake it is imperative to any hope of victory (Prov 28:13). God promises mercy for the repentant, and involved with this mercy is the promise of victory over sin (Rom 6:14).

Habits of sin must be replaced with godly habits. Daily dying to self and its lusts and yielding to God, as empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, can result in a life of victory for God (Rom 6:11-19; Gal 5:16). The Christian must not only "put off" sinful practices, but must replace them by "putting on" godly practices (Col 3). Quitting habits is not the solution to continual victory. Following repentance, a change from sinful habits to godly habits is God's method.¹⁸

The church is God's plan for believers to help one make these changes. Through the ministry of the church, as it properly follows God's principles, the believer can be fully equipped for the Christian life. Christian maturity and stability will be developed for a life pleasing to God (Eph 4:11-16).

The drug abuse problem may seem insurmountable to some. For the Christian it does not have to be. Henry David Thoreau said this: "There are a thousand people hacking away at the branches of evil for every one striking at the roots." The Christian counselor, in helping the believer overcome his problem, must get to the roots. He must be discerning at discovering what prompted the wrong behavior pattern, point out what the sin may be, and then give hope through the guidance of the Scriptures.

*God has provided in salvation all that
is necessary for victory.*

Notes

¹ The Spirit of God indwelling the individual for illumination of Scriptural principles is essential for effective counseling (I Cor 2:12-14).

² Walter S Krusich, *Drugs: "It Can't Happen to Me"* (Denver: Accent Books, 1979) p 32

³ A E Wilder Smith, *The Drug Users* (Wheaton, Ill: Harold Shaw Publ, 1969) pp 143-4

⁴ Krusich, *Drugs: "It Can't Happen to Me"* p 33

⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Vol VII, *I Cor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ Co, 1958) p 221

⁶ Smith, *The Drug Users*, p 110

⁷ Jay E Adams, *The Big Umbrella* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ Co, 1979) pp 225-6

⁸ Smith, *The Drug Users*, p 251

⁹ Homer A Kent Jr, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) p 96

¹⁰ Joan Curlee, *Alcoholism and the Empty Nest* (Topeka, KS: The Menninger Foundation, 1969)

¹¹ Connecticut State Department of Mental Health, *The Stamford Curriculum: A Study Guide to Help Schools and Teachers Combat the Drug Epidemic* (Stamford, Conn: Stamford Public Schools, 1970) p 30

¹² Homer A Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958) p 303

¹³ Jay E Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970) pp 131-7

¹⁴ Krusich, *Drugs: "It Can't Happen to Me"* p 35

¹⁵ Jay Adams, *The Big Umbrella*, p 226

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp 49-54

¹⁷ Larry Grimble, "Bottled Peace: The Christian on Tranquilizers" *Faith for the Family*, Oct. 1981, p 6

¹⁸ Jay E Adams, *What To Do When You Know That You're Hooked* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publ Co, 1975)

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