



Drug Abuse

THE TRAP OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

MARK SHADDAN

(Ecclesiastes 2:1-3)

Craig helps coach his son's softball team, helps the kids with their homework and rarely misses a game or recital. He's devoted to his job, works long hours, and often brings projects home on weekends. People know him as a great neighbor and good friend. What they don't know is that he is a substance abuser on his way to an engulfing addiction.

WHO SUFFERS FROM SUBSTANCE DISORDERS?

The prevalence of substance-induced disorders is high. In the United States, about 13 million people have some form of alcohol-related disorder. In addition, it is estimated that a minimum of 10 percent of any given community has some form of substance disorder diagnosis. Most substance abusers go undetected, however. For example, because women tend to drink covertly and are unlikely to act out socially, men represent a greater proportion of the statistics.

Substance disorders affect all strata of society. Women tend to have higher abuses with prescriptive drugs. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 tend to abuse alcohol more than any age group. Senior citizens seem to have the lowest statistics regarding abuse. Contrary to stereotypes, typical substance abusers are difficult to pick out of a crowd. They work, raise families, even go to church, and appear to have normal lives.

TYPES OF DISORDERS

Two kinds of problems are identified as substance disorders—one is called *abuse*, the other is called *addiction*.

Substance abuse refers to the excessive, problematic use of a substance as a mechanism for coping with stress. Abuse does not mean addiction, although it may

result in addiction. Substance addiction refers to dependency on that substance in order to function. It spills over into one's personal life, family, friends, and even one's relationship with God. Addiction has a strong psychological and physical component where a pattern of use covers four stages: (1) experimentation, (2) heavy social or recreational use, (3) learning to use a substance for a mood altering effect, and (4) a clear addictive stage that is marked by physical and/or psychological dependence regardless of the consequences. At this last stage, the path to sobriety usually necessitates some form of intensive intervention.

REASONS FOR DISORDERS

Substance disorders are rooted in an individual's attempt to avoid or ease pain. Drugs or alcohol, with their ability to shut out the world and give a false "high," ease the person's pain—for a while. Persistent triggers such as learned behavior, poor coping skills, avoidance of responsibility, stressful events, and mood disorders can bring on abusive drinking; in addition, addictive family patterns appear as a factor in alcoholism. With substance addiction, the person's relationship to the substance is idolatrous. The person lives for the substance and is dependent on it just to "feel normal."

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between denial, anger, guilt, frustration, and fear when dealing with their own addictions. They often express annoyance when questioned or criticized. Many will use anger in an attempt to control others' responses to their behavior. Some will attempt to reduce their usage in an attempt to help themselves deal with their addiction. One way or another, each of these behaviors is the addict's way of avoiding responsibility for getting the help they really need.

RESOURCES FOR RECOVERY

Substance disorder is often a family problem; therefore, treatment should include individual and family therapy that focuses on changing faulty belief systems and patterns that enable substance disorders. Someone suffering from substance disorders must learn to identify needs and communicate feelings within the family structure in healthy ways. Even if substance abusers refuse help, their families should seek help in order to be able to cope with the abusers and find out how to help them deal with their addiction more effectively.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 discusses the misuse of drunken pleasure to deal with life. The writer gratified himself with wine in order to find mirth and pleasure, only to discover that this was "vanity." Recovering alcoholics and drug addicts will attest to the vanity, the futility, of trying to find pleasure or to dull pain through alcohol or drugs.

The Bible has a different approach to dealing with pain and life's difficulties. It encourages Christians to endure and persevere so God can work in their lives: "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2, 3). People who have stood the test will receive a crown of life (James 1:12, 13). God prom-

ises to help people work through whatever personal problems they may face. To focus on avoiding pain leads to an exclusive focus on self and a refusal to trust God and learn the lessons He wants to teach through the pain or trial.

Recovery from substance abuse is a process of renewal: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1, 2). "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The choice is between using substances to avoid pain or developing the mind of Christ to access spiritual resources for recovery.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of drug abuse include:

- > Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:21
- > Romans 8:28; 13:13
- > 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 10:13
- > Ephesians 5:18
- > 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10
- > 1 John 1:9

➔ Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on drug abuse at Proverbs 23:19-21 on page 833. See also the personality profile of Belshazzar on page 113.

15 My son, if your heart is wise,
My heart will rejoice—indeed, I
myself;
17 Yes, my inmost being will rejoice
When your lips speak right things.

17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,
But *be zealous* for the fear of the LORD
all the day;

18 For surely there is a hereafter,
And your hope will not be cut off.

19 Hear, my son, and be wise:
And **guide your heart in the way.**
20 Do not mix with winebibbers,
Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
21 For the drunkard and the glutton will
come to poverty,
And drowsiness will clothe *a man* with
rags.

22 Listen to your father who begot you,
And do not despise your mother when
she is old.

23 Buy the truth, and do not sell it,
Also wisdom and instruction and
understanding.

24 The father of the righteous will greatly
rejoice,

And he who begets a wise *child* will
delight in him.

25 Let your father and your mother be
glad,
And let her who bore you rejoice.

26 My son, give me your heart,
And let your eyes observe my ways.

27 For a harlot *is* a deep pit,
And a seductress *is* a narrow well.

28 She also lies in wait as *for* a victim,
And increases the unfaithful among men.

29 Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?

30 Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.

31 Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;

32 At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper.

33 Your eyes will see strange things,
And your heart will utter perverse
things.

34 Yes, you will be like one who lies down
in the midst of the sea,

KEY PASSAGE

TOXIC WASTE

(23:19–21)



Drug Abuse

Like any loving father, Solomon advises his son to be wise and to stay away from drunkards. All those addicted to alcohol can tell you about the “drowsiness” it causes, but most probably won’t admit to the possibility that their drinking could clothe them with rags. Yet alcohol often leads to loss—of reputation, money, marriage, family, or employment.

Alcohol, like most drugs, is a toxic poison to which the body reacts. People first must condition themselves to the taste of alcohol. Then they often indulge in excess and get drunk—a pattern that all too often becomes a way of life. Not only does that lead to often embarrassing situations, it also leads to sickness. People addicted to alcohol can’t stop drinking—they feel that they must drink in order to get moving, get through the day, or get to sleep. Alcohol becomes more important for life than God. God’s people must steer clear of such indulgences.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about drug abuse on pages 852, 853. See also the personality profile of Belshazzar on page 1113.

the presence of the thousand. ²While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. ³Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

⁵In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so

that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. ⁷The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise *men* of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." ⁸Now all the king's wise *men* came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. ⁹Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

¹⁰The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom in whom *is* the Spirit of the

PERSONALITY PROFILE

BELSHAZZAR'S SUBSTANCE ABUSE

(DANIEL 5)



Drug Abuse

Belshazzar's drunken party has a notorious place in history. A royal celebration of a conquering dynasty became a final gasp before defeat. Belshazzar set his tables that night with the precious items taken by his father's victorious armies. Among those silver and golden bowls and cups were many taken from God's temple in Jerusalem. Those dedicated utensils were filled with party wine. God's property was dishonored.

While the king and a thousand of his officials engaged in a drunken bash at the royal palace, the invading army of Medes and Persians surrounded the city. At the high point of the festivities, the fingers of God wrote a message of judgment on the wall of the palace (Dan. 5:5). The message indicated that the Babylonian Empire would fall to the Medes and Persians that very night. History records the fact that the invading army diverted the course of the Euphrates River, tunneled under the walls of Babylon, and took the city without resistance. In their drunken state, Belshazzar and his officials were incapable of resisting the invaders.

Most drug or alcohol abusers discover sooner or later that their surrender to those controlling substances renders them defenseless. Their decision-making abilities suffer badly. Choices that appear wise through a drunken haze or drug-induced high often prove tragic. Temporary sobriety usually provides more of an opportunity to survey the disaster than to repair what has been damaged or lost. Right in the middle of enjoying everything he thought he had, Belshazzar awoke to discover he had nothing. His life went from unmanageable to unlivable in one night. He lost both the kingdom and his life.

Countless others have followed Belshazzar's way of life. They may not have had as much to lose, but they lost it all anyway. Self-abusive lives like Belshazzar's always end sadly. But those who surrender to God and live for Him receive a gift of eternal life that they can never lose. They never have to face the handwriting on the wall.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about drug abuse on pages 852, 853. See also the key passage note at Proverbs 23:19-21 on page 833.

15 *What is crooked cannot be made straight,
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.*

¹⁶I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief,
And he who increases knowledge
increases sorrow.

THE VANITY OF PLEASURE

2 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also *was* vanity. ²I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" ³I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

⁴I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. ⁵I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. ⁶I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. ⁷I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments^a of all kinds.

⁹So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

¹⁰ Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.

I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.

¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done

And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind.

There was no profit under the sun.

THE END OF THE WISE AND THE FOOL

¹² Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;
For what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king?—

Only what he has already done.

¹³ Then I saw that wisdom excels folly
As light excels darkness.

¹⁴ The wise man's eyes *are* in his head,
But the fool walks in darkness.

Yet I myself perceived
That the same event happens to them all.

¹⁵ So I said in my heart,
"As it happens to the fool,
It also happens to me,
And why was I then more wise?"
Then I said in my heart,
"This also *is* vanity."

¹⁶ For *there is* no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever,

2:8 ^aExact meaning unknown

SOUL NOTE



Out of Control (2:1–3) King Solomon had the money, the time, and the power to indulge himself in any pleasure he desired. He sought to gratify himself with wine, only to find that he still struggled to find meaning and purpose in life.

Thousands of years ago, this king discovered what many still don't seem to know—alcohol will not solve any problems, nor will it fill the emptiness within that drives people to such excess in the first place. Alcohol is a temporary salve, ultimately leaving drinkers empty in their search for peace and significance. **Topic: Drug Abuse**

TWO COVENANTS

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic. For these are the^a two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—²⁶but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. ²⁷For it is written:

*“Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.”^a*

²⁸Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. ²⁹But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so it is now. ³⁰Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? *“Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”^a* ³¹So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

5 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free,^a and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ²Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you

nothing. ³And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. ⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to be* justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW

⁷You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? ⁸This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. ⁹A little leaven leavens the whole lump. ¹⁰I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

¹¹And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. ¹²I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

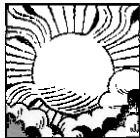
¹³For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”^a* ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the

4:24 ^aNU-Text and M-Text omit *the*. 4:27 ^aIsaiah 54:1 4:30 ^aGenesis 21:10 5:1 ^aNU-Text reads *For freedom Christ has made us free; stand fast therefore*. 5:14 ^aLeviticus 19:18

SOUL NOTE



Too Much (5:19–21) This list of the “works of the flesh” includes “drunkenness, revelries, and the like.” Drinking excessively and allowing alcohol to take over one’s senses is sinful and reveals a lack of self-control. Drunkenness also leads to other sins, such as taking part in “revelries” that might have consequences far beyond one’s control. Involvement in any kind of substance abuse, whether it’s alcohol or drugs, is sinful, and believers must turn away from it. If they have faced that difficulty in their past, they can trust God to help them overcome the temptation and learn self-control (5:23).

Topic: Drug Abuse

⁵For this you know,^a that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not be partakers with them.

WALK IN LIGHT

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the Spirit^a is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹And have no fel-

lowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

5:5 ^aNU-Text reads *For know this*. 5:9 ^aNU-Text reads *light*.

KEY PASSAGE



Relation-
ships

KIND, TENDER, FORGIVING

(4:31, 32)

As God's people, we must put out of our lives bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speech, and malice. Then we should replace those attitudes and actions with positive ones:

- *Being kind to one another.* We should act charitably and benevolently to all people, regardless of how we are treated in return. That means taking the initiative in being kind.
- *Being tenderhearted.* This means having compassion. We should show genuine sensitivity, allowing for others' faults and failings while still showing care and concern.
- *Being forgiving . . . even as God in Christ forgave us.* This is probably the most difficult. If our relationships are going to flourish, we need to be able to forgive others. Christ forgave all our sins and continues to forgive us daily. We can forgive because we are forgiven.

Consider how our relationships would change if we lived by these words!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about relationships on pages 856, 857. See also the personality profile of David and Jonathan on page 372.

SOUL NOTE



What a Waste (5:18) Drunkenness has no place in believers' lives. To become "drunk with wine," or any alcoholic drink, reveals a lack of self-control. Getting drunk, wrote Paul, is "dissipation," referring to the waste of time and money caused by partying and an out-of-control lifestyle. The waste of God-given talents and resources, the consequences of drunkenness, and addiction to alcohol should keep people from substance abuse. The underlying issue, of course, is who or what is in charge of a person's life. Believers should be able to say that God is in charge and then trust Him to help them overcome such behaviors. **Topic: Drug Abuse**

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