

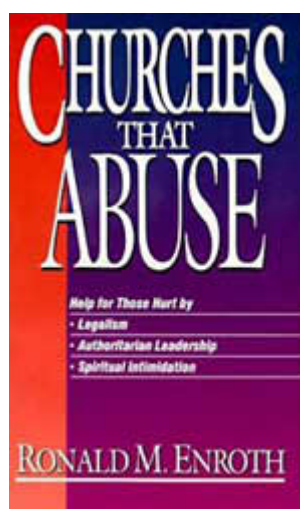
# Abusive Churches

*What characterizes abusive churches is their cultic method of ministry. Although outwardly orthodox in their theology, these churches use abusive and mind control methods to get their followers to submit to the organization. In this article Dr. Pat Zukeran covers eight characteristics of abusive churches.*

[This article is also available in Spanish.](#)



We are all familiar with traditional cults such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. There are, however, other groups with cultic characteristics that do not fit the same profile as the traditional cults. Sometimes called "abusive churches" or even "Bible-based cults," they appear outwardly orthodox in their doctrinal beliefs. What distinguishes these groups or churches from genuine orthodox Christianity is their abusive, cultic-like methodology and philosophy of ministry.



In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ronald Enroth carefully examines several of these churches throughout the United States. He reveals the cultic methods these groups use and points out several distinguishing marks of abusive churches. At this point I will briefly introduce each of these characteristics and some of my own. Later, I'll discuss all these characteristics in detail.

First, abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. Second, the leaders of such churches often use manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. Third, there is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Fourth, these churches tend to change their names often,

especially once they are exposed by the media. Fifth, denouncing other churches is common because they see themselves as superior to all other churches. Sixth, these churches have a persecution complex and view themselves as being persecuted by the world, the media, and other Christian churches. Seventh, abusive churches specifically target young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. The eighth and final mark of abusive churches is the great difficulty members have in getting out of or leaving these churches, a process often marked by social, psychological, or emotional pain.

Those involved in a church that seems to reflect these characteristics would be wise to evaluate the situation thoroughly and leave the church if it is appropriate. Staying may increase the risks of damaging your family relationships and multiplies the likelihood of losing your perspective. Members of such churches often develop a distorted view of reality, distrust everyone, and suffer from stress, fear, and depression. Some former members even continue to experience these things after escaping from an abusing church. There are also several documented cases in which associating with an abusive church has led to the deaths of individuals or their relatives.

Some of these groups have networks of many sister churches. In some cases these groups have split off from more mainstream denominations. Occasionally the new groups have even been denounced by the founding denomination. Such groups often disguise themselves by frequently changing the name of their organization, especially following adverse publicity. This practice makes the true nature of these organizations more difficult to determine for the unsuspecting individual. Some abusive churches have college ministries all across the country. On some university campuses such student movements are among the largest groups on their respective campuses.

It is important that Christians today know the Bible and know

how to recognize such churches so as not to fall into their traps. In order to help people become more aware of churches which may be abusing their members, I now want to go through in more detail the eight characteristics I mentioned earlier.

## **Control-Oriented Leadership**

A central feature of an abusive church is control-oriented leadership. The leader in an abusive church is dogmatic, self-confident, arrogant, and the spiritual focal point in the lives of his followers. The leader assumes he is more spiritually in tune with God than anyone else. He claims insight into Scripture that no one else has. Or, he may state that he receives personal revelations from God. Because of such claims, the leader's position and beliefs cannot be questioned; his statements are final. To members of this type of church or group, questioning the leader is the equivalent of questioning God. Although the leader may not come out and state this fact, this attitude is clearly seen by the treatment of those who dare to question or challenge the leader. The leader of the movement often makes personal decisions for his followers. Individual thinking is prohibited; thus the followers become dependent on the leader.

In the hierarchy of such a church, the leader is, or tends to be, accountable to no one. Even if there is an elder board, it is usually made up of men who are loyal to, and will never disagree with, the leader. This style of leadership is not one endorsed in the Bible. According to Scripture all believers have equal access to God and are equal before Him because we are made in His image, and we are all under the authority of the Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 believers are directed to measure all teachings against the Word of God. Acts 17:11 states that even the apostle Paul was under the authority of the Bible, and the Bereans were commended because they tested Paul's teachings with the Scriptures. Leaders and laity alike are to live according to Scripture.

## **Manipulation of Members**

Abusive churches are characterized by the manipulation of their members. Manipulation is the use of external forces to get others to do what someone else wants them to do. Here manipulation is used to get people to submit to the leadership of the church. The tactics of manipulation include the use of guilt, peer pressure, intimidation, and threats of divine judgment from God for disobedience. Often harsh discipline is carried out publicly to promote ridicule and humiliation.

Another tactic is the “shepherding” philosophy. As practiced in many abusive churches this philosophy requires every member to be personally accountable to another more experienced person. To this person, one must reveal all personal thoughts, feelings, and discuss future decisions. This personal information, is not used to *help* the member, but to *control* the member.

Another means of control is isolation. Abusive churches may cut off contact between a new member and his family, friends, and anyone else not associated with the church.

How different this style of leadership is from the leadership of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lovingly, gently, humbly, and sacrificially leads His sheep.

## **Rigid, Legalistic Lifestyle**

The third characteristic of abusive churches is the rigid, legalistic lifestyle of their members. This rigidity is a natural result of the leadership style. Abusive churches require unwavering devotion to the church from their followers. Allegiance to the church has priority over allegiance to God, family, or anything else.

Often members are required or pressured to attend Bible studies five, six, or seven days a week. There is a

requirement to do evangelism; a certain quota of contacts must be met, and some churches even require members to fill out time cards recording how many hours they spent in evangelism, etc. Daily schedules are made for the person; thus he is endlessly doing the church's ministry. Former members of one church told me they were working for their church from 5:00 am to 12:00 midnight five days a week.

Members of such churches frequently drop out of school, quit working, or even neglect their families to do the work required by the church. There are also guidelines for dress, dating, finances, and so on. Such details are held to be of major importance in these churches.

In churches like these, people begin to lose their personal identity and start acting like programmed robots. Many times, the pressure and demands of the church will cause a member to have a nervous breakdown or fall into severe depression. As I reflect on these characteristics I think of Jesus' words concerning the Pharisees who "tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger" (Matt. 23: 4). What a contrast from the leadership style of Jesus who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. . . .For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

## **Frequent Changing of Group/Church Name**

A fourth characteristic of abusive churches is a pattern of constantly changing the name of the church or campus ministry. Often a name change is a response to unfavorable publicity by the media. Some abusive churches have changed their name several times in the course of a few years.

If you are in such a church, one that has changed its name several times because of bad publicity, or if you feel unceasing pressure to live up to its demands, it is probably

time to carefully evaluate the ministry of the church and your participation in it.

## **Denouncing All Other Churches**

Let us now take a look at the fifth characteristic: abusive churches usually denounce all other Christian churches. They see themselves as spiritually elite. They feel that they alone have the truth and all other churches are corrupt. Therefore, they do not associate with other Christian churches. They often refer to themselves as some special group such as, "God's Green Berets," "The faithful remnant," or "God's end-time army." There is a sense of pride in abusive churches because members feel they have a special relationship with God and His movement in the world. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth quotes a former member of one such group who states, "Although we didn't come right out and say it, in our innermost hearts we really felt that there was no place in the world like our assembly. We thought the rest of Christianity was out to lunch." However the Bible makes it clear, that there are no spiritually elite groups or churches. Ephesians 4:36 states, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope, when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all."

The Christian church universal is united by the same God, the same Holy Spirit, and the fundamental beliefs of the Bible which include such things as the Trinity, authority of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, and so on. In these central truths we stand united. A church which believes itself to be elite and does not associate with other Christian churches is not motivated by the spirit of God but by divisive pride.

## **Persecution Complex**

The sixth characteristic follows naturally. Because abusive churches see themselves as elite, they expect persecution in the world and even feed on it. Criticism and exposure by the media are seen as proof that they are the true church being persecuted by Satan. However, the persecution received by abusive churches is different from the persecution received by Jesus and the Apostles.

Jesus and the Apostles were persecuted for preaching the truth. Abusive churches bring on much of their negative press because of their own actions. Yet, any criticism received, no matter what the source—whether Christian or secular—is always viewed as an attack from Satan, even if the criticisms are based on the Bible. This makes it difficult to witness to a person in such a church for he will see your attempt to share the gospel with him as persecution. Often in cases like these, when I am accused of persecuting, I simply reply, “I am here talking to you with the Word of God which you say you believe. How can this be persecution?” This approach often helps in continuing the dialogue with a member of an abusive church who has been brainwashed to believe that all opposition is persecution.

## **Targeting Young Adults**

The seventh characteristic of abusive churches is that they tend to target young adults ages 18-25 who are in the middle class, well educated, idealistic, and often immature Christians. Young adults are the perfect age group to focus on because they are often looking for a cause to give their lives to, and they need love, affirmation, and acceptance. Often these churches will provide this, and the leaders frequently take the role of surrogate parents.

## Painful Exit Process

The eighth characteristic is a painful and difficult exit process. Members in many such churches are afraid to leave because of intimidation, pressure, and threats of divine judgment. Sometimes members who exit are harassed and pursued by church leaders. The majority of the time, former members are publicly ridiculed and humiliated before the church, and members are told not to associate in any way with any former members. This practice is called shunning.

Many who leave abusive churches because of the intimidation and brainwashing, actually feel they have left God Himself. None of their former associates will fellowship with them, and they feel isolated, abused, and fearful of the world. One former member of a particular campus ministry said, "If you leave without the leadership's approval, condemnation and guilt are heaped upon you. My pastor told me he thought it was satanic for me to leave and wondered if I could continue my salvation experience."

Let me conclude this discussion by sharing some practical ways of reaching those who are involved in abusive churches. First, we must begin with prayer. Witnessing to those brainwashed in abusive churches is often intimidating and difficult. Often leaders will not allow an individual member to meet with an outsider unless accompanied by an older, more experienced person who is trained in debating and/or intimidation. Therefore, we must pray (1) for a chance to speak with the individual<sup>{1}</sup> and that he would be open to what we have to share.<sup>{2}</sup>

Second, lovingly confront the person and surface some biblical issues. Often, abusive churches have a bizarre teaching or a theological error that can be pointed out. In his book *Churches That Abuse*, Dr. Ron Enroth documents several examples of this. For instance, the leader of one church had strange teachings based on his claims of extra-biblical revelations

from God.<sup>{3}</sup> These included dietary laws, sexual behavior, home decorations, and others. The leader of another group called doctors “medical deities.” He also claimed medicines had demonic names and if taken, opened a person up to demonic influence.<sup>{4}</sup> Pointing out errors, inconsistencies, and bizarre beliefs may open the individual’s mind and prompt him to begin asking questions.

Third, share articles you may find in the newspaper or in magazines on the particular church under discussion. The book that I have often quoted from, *Churches That Abuse*, is an excellent resource. The key is to get the individual to start asking questions and research answers for himself. Tell him to test everything with the Scriptures and not to be afraid to ask questions. If the leader is afraid or hesitant to answer a member’s honest questions, the maturity of that leadership may be suspect.

Jesus, however, said that truth is a means of freedom, not bondage. He said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

## Notes

1. Ronald Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), p. 118.
2. Ibid., p. 181.
3. Ibid., p. 128.
4. Ibid., p. 170.

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# Verbal Abuse: A Biblical Perspective

*Kerby Anderson offers a distinctly Christian view of this important topic. Taking a biblical perspective moves this problem from strictly emotional to its full implications for our spiritual lives.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

I would like to address the subject of verbal abuse for two important reasons. First, our behavior is often a great indicator of our worldview. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” What a person thinks in his or her mind and heart will be reflected in his or her words and actions. Verbal abuse and physical abuse result from a worldview that is clearly not biblical.

Second, I want to deal with verbal abuse because of the incredible need for Christians to address the subject. Ten years ago I did a week of radio programs on this topic, and I have received more e-mails from men and women who read that transcript than any other article. They were grateful that I addressed the subject. Since there are some new books and web sites, I wanted to update the original article.

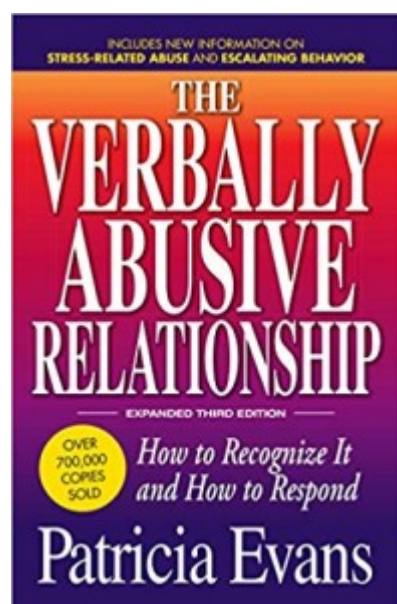


Most of us know someone who has been verbally abused. Perhaps you are involved in a verbally abusive relationship. It is also possible that no one even knows your circumstances. Verbal abuse is a kind of battering which doesn't leave evidence comparable to the bruises of physical battering. You (or your friend) may be suffering in silence and isolation.

I want to tackle this very important issue in an effort to understand this phenomenon and provide answers. First, we

should acknowledge that verbal abuse is often more difficult to see since there are rarely any visible scars unless physical abuse has also taken place. It is often less visible simply because the abuse may always take place in private. The victim of verbal abuse lives in a gradually more confusing realm. In public, the victim is with one person. While in private, the abuser may become a completely different person.

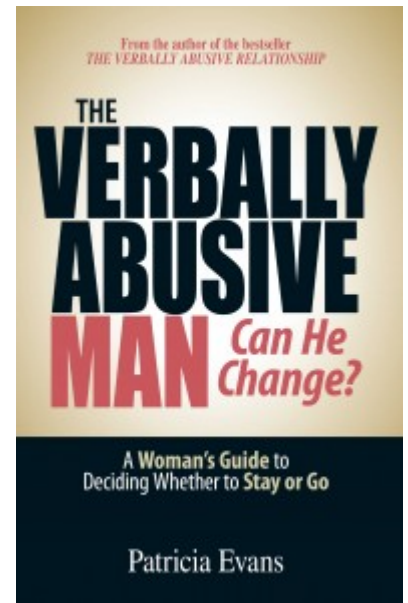
Frequently, the perpetrator of verbal abuse is male and the victim is female, but not always. There are many examples of women who are quite verbally abusive. But for the sake of simplicity of pronouns in this program, I will often identify the abuser as male and the victim as female.



One of the first books to describe verbal abuse in adults was Patricia Evans's book *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.<sup>{1}</sup> She interviewed forty verbally abused women who ranged in age from 21 to 66. Most of the women had left a verbally abusive relationship. We will use some of the characteristics and categories of verbal abuse these women describe in this book.

Years later, she wrote a second book, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?*<sup>{2}</sup> In that book she makes the claim the some men can change under certain circumstances. That led to the subtitle of her book, "A Woman's Guide to Deciding Whether to Stay or Go."

Is there hope that some abusers can change? Yes, but the key to healing is for the person being abused to recognize verbal abuse for what it is and to begin to take deliberate steps to stop it and bring healing. Since the abuser is usually in denial, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse often rests with the partner.



## Characteristics of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the characteristics of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.[\[3\]](#)

1. Verbal abuse is hurtful and usually attacks the nature and abilities of the partner. Over time, the partner may begin to believe that there is something wrong with her or her abilities. She may come to feel that she is the problem, rather than her partner.
2. Verbal abuse may be overt (through angry outbursts and name-calling) or covert (involving very subtle comments, even something that approaches brainwashing). Overt verbal abuse is usually blaming and accusatory, and consequently confusing to the partner. Covert verbal abuse, which is hidden aggression, is even more confusing to the partner. Its aim is to control her without her knowing.
3. Verbal abuse is manipulative and controlling. Even disparaging comments may be voiced in an extremely sincere and concerned way. But the goal is to control and manipulate.
4. Verbal abuse is insidious. The partner's self-esteem gradually diminishes, usually without her realizing it. She

may consciously or unconsciously try to change her behavior so as not to upset the abuser.

5. Verbal abuse is unpredictable. In fact, unpredictability is one of the most significant characteristics of verbal abuse. The partner is stunned, shocked, and thrown off balance by her mate's sarcasm, angry jab, put-down, or hurtful comment.

6. Verbal abuse is not a side issue. It is *the* issue in the relationship. When a couple is having an argument about a real issue, the issue can be resolved. In a verbally abusive relationship, there is no specific conflict. The issue is the abuse, and this issue is not resolved. There is no closure.

7. Verbal abuse expresses a double message. There is incongruence between the way the abuser speaks and her real feelings. For example, she may sound very sincere and honest while she is telling her partner what is wrong with him.

8. Verbal abuse usually escalates, increasing in intensity, frequency, and variety. The verbal abuse may begin with put-downs disguised as jokes. Later other forms might surface. Sometimes the verbal abuse may escalate into physical abuse, starting with "accidental" shoves, pushes, and bumps.

## Categories of Verbal Abuse

What are some of the categories of verbal abuse? Here is a list as outlined in *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.[{4}](#)

The first category of verbal abuse is *withholding*. A marriage requires intimacy, and intimacy requires empathy. If one partner withholds information and feelings, then the marriage bond weakens. The abuser who refuses to listen to his partner denies her experience and leaves her isolated.

The second is *countering*. This is the dominant response of the verbal abuser who sees his partner as an adversary. He is

constantly countering and correcting everything she says and does. Internally he may even be thinking, "How dare she have a different view!"

Countering is very destructive to a relationship because it prevents the partner from knowing what his mate thinks about anything. Sometimes the verbal abuser will cut off discussion in mid-sentence before he can finish his thought. In many ways, she cannot even allow him to have his own thoughts.

A third category of verbal abuse is *discounting*. This is like taking a one hundred-dollar item and reducing its price to one cent. Discounting denies the reality and experience of the partner and is extremely destructive. It can be a most insidious form of verbal abuse because it denies and distorts the partner's actual perception of the abuse.

Sometimes verbal abuse is disguised as jokes. Although his comments may masquerade as humor, they cut the partner to the quick. The verbal jabs may be delivered crassly or with great skill, but they all have the same effect of diminishing the partner and throwing her off balance.

A fifth form of verbal abuse is *blocking and diverting*. The verbal abuser refuses to communicate, establishes what *can* be discussed, or withholds information. He can prevent any possibility of resolving conflicts by blocking and diverting.

*Accusing and blaming* is another form. A verbal abuser will accuse his partner of some wrongdoing or some breach of the basic agreement of the relationship. This has the effect of diverting the conversation and putting the other partner on the defensive.

Another form of verbal abuse is *judging and criticizing*. The verbal abuser may judge her partner and then express her judgment in a critical way. If he objects, she may tell him that she is just pointing something out to be helpful, but in reality she is expressing her lack of acceptance of him.

These are just a few of the categories of verbal abuse. Next we will look at a number of other forms of verbal abuse.

## Other Forms of Verbal Abuse

*Trivializing* can also be a form of verbal abuse. I discuss this in more detail in [my article](#) on why marriages fail.<sup>{5}</sup> It is an attempt to take something that is said or done and make it insignificant. Often the partner becomes confused and believes she hasn't effectively explained to her mate how important certain things are to her.

*Undermining* is also verbal abuse. The abuser not only withholds emotional support, but also erodes confidence and determination. The abuser often will squelch an idea or suggestion just by a single comment.

*Threatening* is a classic form of verbal abuse. He manipulates his partner by bringing up her biggest fears. This may include threatening to leave or threatening to get a divorce. In some cases, the threat may be to escalate the abuse.

*Name-calling* can also be verbal abuse. Continually calling someone "stupid" because she isn't as intelligent as you or calling her a "klutz" because she is not as coordinated can have a devastating effect on the partner's self esteem.

Verbal abuse may also involve *forgetting*. This may involve both overt and covert manipulation. Everyone forgets things from time to time, but the verbal abuser consistently does so. After the partner collects himself, subsequent to being yelled at, he may confront his mate only to find that she has "forgotten" about the incident. Some abusers consistently forget about the promises they have made which are most important to their partners.

*Ordering* is another classic form of verbal abuse. It denies the equality and autonomy of the partner. When an abuser gives

orders instead of asking, he treats her like a slave or subordinate.

*Denial* is the last category of verbal abuse. Although all forms of verbal abuse have serious consequences, denial can be very insidious because it denies the reality of the partner. In fact, a verbal abuser could read over this list of categories and insist that he is not abusive.

That is why it is so important for the partner to recognize these characteristics and categories since the abuser is usually in denial. Thus, the responsibility for recognizing verbal abuse and doing something about it often rests with the partner.

We have described various characteristics of verbal abuse and have even discussed the various categories of verbal abuse. Finally, I would like to provide a biblical perspective.

## **A Biblical Perspective of Verbal Abuse**

The Bible clearly warns us about the dangers of an angry person. Proverbs 22:24 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man." And Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

It is not God's will for you (or your friend) to be in a verbally abusive relationship. Those angry and critical words will destroy your confidence and self-esteem. Being submissive in a marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22) does not mean allowing yourself to be verbally beaten by your partner. 1 Peter 3:1 does teach that wives, by being submissive to their husbands, *may* win them to Christ by their behavior. But it does *not* teach that they must allow themselves to be verbally or physically abused.

Here are some key biblical principles. First, know that God

loves you. The Bible teaches, "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

Second, deal with your feelings of guilt. You may be feeling that the problems in your marriage are your fault. "If only I would do better, he wouldn't be so angry with me." The Bible teaches in Psalm 51:6 that "Surely You desire truth in the inner parts; You teach me wisdom in the inmost place." Even though you may have feelings of guilt, you may not be the guilty party. I would recommend you read [my article](#) on the subject of false guilt.[{6}](#)

A related issue is shame. You may feel that something is wrong with you. You may feel that you are a bad person. But God declares you His cherished creation. Psalms 139:14 says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

A key element in this area of verbal abuse will no doubt be confrontation of the abuser. It's important for you to realize that confrontation is a biblical principle. Jesus taught about this in Matthew 18:15-20. I would recommend that you seek help from a pastor or counselor. But I would also recommend that you gather godly men and women together who can lovingly confront the person who is verbally abusing you. Their goal should be to break through their denial and lovingly restore them with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1).

But whether you confront the abuser or not, I do recommend that you seek out others who can encourage you and support you. If the abuser is willing to confront his sin and get help, that is good. But even if he will not, your hope is in the Lord and in those who should surround you and encourage you.

## **Notes**

1. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*

(Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1996).

2. Patricia Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Man: Can He Change?* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006).

3. Evans, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*, 81-84.

4. Ibid., 85-104.

5. Kerby Anderson, "Why Marriages Fail," Probe, 1998, [probe.org/why-marriages-fail/](http://probe.org/why-marriages-fail/).

6. Kerby Anderson, "False Guilt," Probe, 1996, [www.probe.org/false-guilt/](http://www.probe.org/false-guilt/).

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## Why Our Expectations of God Are Unrealistic

In my last blog post I talked about "[Unrealistic Expectations](#)" and promised to explore some of the reasons our expectations of God are unrealistic (and thus why we get frustrated or even furious with Him). I mentioned several ways in which we think God *should* act. Here are my responses to why those expectations are unrealistic.

- *Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same*

No child ever has to be taught about fairness. The heart's cry for justice is part of our design. But we are broken in our understanding of so many things, and we usually equate fairness with equality. We want God to treat everyone the same way. But God isn't doing the same thing in everyone; He is creating a masterpiece that will bring glory to Him and goodness to us for all eternity, and His means and tools will differ from person to person. Creating a masterpiece of sculpture in a piece of marble takes different tools and

techniques than creating a masterpiece of an oil painting. It's a good thing that God doesn't treat us all the same.

- *Give us an easy life*

Easy, sheltered, enabled lives produce spoiled, entitled children. God's intention is that we grow up to maturity, which necessitates learning to survive the bumps in the road and the harder aspects of living in a fallen world. He is creating an adult, glorious bride for the Lamb, who is fit to reign with Him. An easy life is completely inadequate to the task of preparing us as the church to become the bride of Christ.

- *If I do all the right things to be "a good person," God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to*

That linear "A ensures B" kind of thinking makes sense to our limited, immature minds, but reality doesn't work that way. We cannot manipulate God to make life work the way we want it to. We are part of a much bigger picture that involves spiritual warfare, the battle against our own flesh, and God's purposes that can only be accomplished in ways we don't understand in the process.

One of the most important places of understanding God wants us to reach is the profound truth I saw on a t-shirt once:

2 essential truths:

1. There is a God.
2. You are not him.

God is God, and we are not. We don't get to dictate the way life works, and God will lovingly bring us to the point, as many times as necessary, where we let go of the illusion that we are in control.

He is in control. We are not. And that's a good thing.

But the granddaddy of unrealistic, albeit understandably so,

expectations are these:

- *Protect the innocent from pain and suffering*
- *Protect the people who maybe-aren't-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering*

This is really the bottom line issue for most problems with our understanding of God, the age-old difficult question, "How can a good and loving God allow pain and suffering?"

The bottom line answer is that because of the sinful choices of Adam and Eve, we all live in a world where evil and suffering were unleashed. Our world is now fallen and corrupt, and bad things happen all the time. Part of the equation is that God honors our choices, which are significant and real—even the choices that bring unintended consequences of pain and suffering. Yet God is in control, and He can redeem even the most heinous choices and the most awful pain and suffering. He delights to exchange "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:3).

We have a hard time imagining how God can bring good out of evil, and especially out of our pain. Sometimes it's even harder when we look outside ourselves, to the suffering of innocent children such as the growing number of children abused and murdered by their mothers' boyfriends. And I really don't have an answer for that; I just know that God is good, and He is loving, and my inability to see how He will make it all okay in the end does not affect whether it's true or not.

One of my favorite stories comes from my dear friend whom I'll call Emily, who was not only raped repeatedly by her father from the time she was two years old, but he would take money from his friends so they could abuse her as well. Emily has a vibrant relationship with Jesus, especially because she has learned to listen to Him.

One day after the Holy Spirit gently restored a vivid memory of one of these gang-rape sessions for her to process, she said, "Jesus, I had a sense of being covered in something heavy, like a stack of blankets, while the abuse was going on. What was that about?" The Lord lovingly told her, "That was Me lying on top of you, protecting you from the full brunt of the abuse you were experiencing. The men had to come through Me to get to you, and I took a portion of their evil into Myself before it got to you." Through her tears, she asked, "But why? How could there possibly be any good to come out of that horrific sexual abuse?" Jesus said, "Beloved, you are a diamond of great value. Every incident of abuse that you sustained was a hammer and chisel in My Father's hands, creating a new facet in the diamond. When you see the finished product, you won't believe the stunning beauty of the jewel that you are. And you will say it was worth it."

(Incidentally, Emily hasn't had to wait till heaven to start seeing the value of her horrific suffering. She has been able to be "Jesus with skin on" to other wounded women and children because she understands their suffering.)

The reason our expectations of God are so often unrealistic is because He is so much bigger, so much more glorious, so much more loving, so much more in control, than we can possibly comprehend. May we grow in our understanding as He continues to prove Himself faithful and good—in everything.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/why\\_our\\_expectations\\_of\\_god\\_are\\_unrealistic](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/why_our_expectations_of_god_are_unrealistic) on Oct. 26, 2010.

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# “Is It OK For a Pastor to Hit His Adult Daughter?”

Is it right for a pastor to hit his 22-year-old daughter? And not feel the need to apologize? Even if it's because it was first a heated argument? Is it right?

Oh \_\_\_\_\_. I am so sorry! No ma'am, it is NOT right for any man to hit any woman for any reason. It is an abuse of his strength and an abuse of his God-given position of protector of his family.

When we are speaking on [“Guys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus”](#) (gender differences), my husband Ray always reads this quote from Stu Weber in his book *Tender Warrior*:

“Let me put it a little more bluntly—if you lay a hand on a woman, you should be shot, okay? A woman was made to be provided for, protected, and cared for. A man was made to be a provider, protector, and care-giver. Nothing is more pitiful than a man forfeiting his masculinity or a woman her femininity by transgressing the created order.”

I would hope that there would be healthy accountability in place in your church that you could go to the elders of the church and ask for help. I would put it like this, taking my cue from Abigail's respectful confrontation of David when he was angry and ready for blood (1 Samuel 25): “Dad, it's not right for you to use your strength to hurt me. I'm going to ask you one time to please don't do that again. When you treat me so disrespectfully, you are not being the man of God that I know you want to be. I want to help you be the godly father I know you want to be, so if you ever hit me again I just want you to know I'm going to the elders to ask them to help you with your anger and lack of self-control.”

That, of course, would infuriate him, because people doing

shameful things don't want to be forced to face it. And it's possible that in the culture of your church or your community, men don't think there's anything wrong with hitting women they're related to. If that's the case, you might want to think about finding a safer place to live.

But the bottom line is no, it's not right, and I'm sorry you even had to ask.

Sue Bohlin

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# **The Mitchell Report: Christian Response to Steroids in Sports**

*Heather Zeiger considers the question of how Christians should respond to the revelations regarding steroid use in sports. The Mitchell report is one example accompanied by many others such as the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency report on cyclist, Lance Armstrong. Heather takes a biblical worldview perspective on this issue taking into consideration their impact on our bodies, our perception of the world, and the perception of young people on what is acceptable in our society. As a Christian, there are numerous reasons not to take steroids and not to glorify the accomplishments of those who do.*

Former Senator George Mitchell was charged to investigate and document the prevalence of steroid and human growth hormone use in Major League Baseball. The objective of the report was not only to bring to light the steroid problem, but to offer

solutions to help eradicate its use and abuse. Senator Mitchell specifically wanted “the media to focus less on names and more on central conclusions and recommendations of the report.”<sup>{1}</sup>

Later this month and in February, hearings before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform will be held to determine if stronger penalties for steroid use and more rigorous testing are appropriate. The committee will also investigate whether certain athletes are guilty of using performance enhancing drugs. This has brought the topic of steroid abuse in sports to the forefront of the media, providing an excellent opportunity for discussion.

Sport is an important part of life. The Apostle Paul wrote about running and boxing, and used it as an analogy for the Christian walk.<sup>{2}</sup> And unlike the Gnostics who despise the body, we honor it as part of our *imago dei* or being created in God’s image (for more information see [Bodybuilding: Edifying Thoughts About Our Bodies](#) by Michael Gleghorn). So as Christians, we embrace playing sports and exercise. But like so many things, there is a way to play sports that is consistent with a Christian worldview and a way that is not. There are both physical and biblical reasons why steroid use is dangerous and unethical.

## What are Steroids?

The first reported use of performance enhancers was in 776 B.C.<sup>{3}</sup> when athletes would eat sheep testicles to increase their testosterone levels. Today athletes don’t use sheep, but the intention is still to increase their testosterone beyond natural levels. Steroids are chemicals that are either a form of testosterone or a testosterone precursor. *Anabolic androgenic steroids* (AAS)<sup>{4}</sup> increase muscle mass and muscle recovery by producing five to thirty times the testosterone that the typical male body produces.<sup>{5}</sup> Athletes who abuse steroids do see an increase in muscle mass and/or speed, and

at first, will see improvements in their performance. ESPN's *The Dope on Steroids* reports that steroids can make the body as much as 50 percent more muscular than is possible without them.[{6}](#)

Using steroids to increase muscle strength is illegal, but there are many forms of steroids that remain undetectable in drug tests making it difficult to regulate their use. Furthermore, players have also abused another illegal, undetectable drug called *human growth hormone*, which is not a steroid, but is often used in conjunction with steroids to make a player bigger and to speed injury recovery.[{7}](#) Random drug testing creates controversy over privacy violations, and announced tests are easy to beat. By using water-based steroids, it only takes a couple of weeks for players' bodies to dilute the chemicals to undetectable levels.

While steroids do produce short-term results, the side effects and long-term effects can be devastating.

## **The Problem**

### **Side-Effects**

Physical side-effects from steroid use include increases in cholesterol, acne on arms and back, increase in blood pressure, stiffening of heart tissue, increased production of body hair yet decreased production of scalp hair, stunted growth, hypogonadism (diminished hormonal or reproductive functioning in the testes or the ovaries), sexual dysfunction, and increased risks for both strokes and heart attacks. Psychological side effects include aggressiveness, depression, and addiction/dependence. See [Dangers of Steroid Abuse](#) for a more detailed look at these and other possible side-effects to steroid abuse.

### **Influence on Teens**

Athletes are role models for kids, and some studies indicate

that athletes are second only to parents in their influence on teen choices. I remember watching track and field as a child and later as a teenager and being captivated by the runners. They had this combination of grace and strength that I admired, so I eventually took up running.

Kids turn to athletes for inspiration all the time, but the problem is they also believe that the athletes are successful because they use steroids. Take this testimonial from [www.steroidabuse.com](http://www.steroidabuse.com) as an example:

*For me, taking steroids was a natural move. I was an athlete in high school and got a college scholarship to play football at a major university. Between my senior year of high school and my freshman year of college I started my first cycle because I thought I needed to be faster. I took injectable testosterone and winstrol. I figured that winstrol must be good because it's what Ben Johnson got busted using. I wanted to be fast like him.*

*I was getting stronger at every workout and feeling great. I had heard that steroids can make your joints weaker but I figured Ben Johnson didn't have that problem, so it was probably just a rumor. {8}*

Another testimonial discusses how a parent's obsession with his son, Corey, and his athletic success eventually lead him to administering steroids to Corey when he was only 13. He thought this was how the pros compete. In the end, Corey, now 18, comments about his steroid experience:

*As Corey tries to scrounge together enough money to get his own place, one point still gnaws at him: He firmly believes he could have been a champion without pharmacological enhancement.*

*Soft-spoken and reserved, Corey wavers among embarrassment,*

*regret and awe when he reflects on his fractured teenage years and his experiment with steroids. "People make it sound like these medications are only performance-enhancing, but they have a huge mental impact as well," he says. "By the time I was done, I was a wreck..."*[{9}](#)

And as the Mitchell Report stated, "After the Associated Press reported Mark McGwire was using androstenedione (a testosterone precursor)...sales of that substance increased by over 1000%."[{10}](#) Athletes have a strong influence on people, especially teens.

## **The Christian Worldview**

When the news of Barry Bonds' alleged steroid use broke last summer, *Newsweek* commentator George Will observed that "Athletes who are chemically propelled to victory do not merely overvalue winning, they misunderstand why winning is properly valued... In fact, it becomes a display of some chemists' virtuosity and some athlete's bad character." He later adds that "the athlete's proper goal is to perform unusually well, not unnaturally well."[{11}](#) We have a moral foundation for these points in God's word.

First of all, steroids cause the body to be enhanced beyond what it was designed to do. We believe that God has designed us with his purposes in mind, and he has gifted people with different talents and abilities. From an engineering perspective, he put the parts together with a particular design in mind, so when a steroid user becomes stronger than that for which he was designed, the rest of the parts, his joints, tendons, and ligaments, become damaged.[{12}](#)

Secondly, steroids are often taken for cosmetic reasons—usually by men obsessed with acquiring a certain physique. As we see from Scripture, this is a disproportionate view of the human body. The Bible tells us to offer our bodies

as living sacrifices.[\[13\]](#) And as we see in Luke 12:22-34, Jesus tells us not to worry over what we will eat or drink and what to wear, that He will provide what is necessary. This puts the body in its proper perspective as something to care for, but not something to obsess over.

Lastly, there is a character issue here. Consider the Apostle Paul's view of weakness, which we could apply to physical weakness as well:

*So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, and that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, ESV).*

As Christians, we believe in being good stewards of our health, but there is a difference between "therapeutic" and "enhancement." Therapeutic medical advancements alleviate the effects of the fall of man, such as death and suffering. Enhancements involve man trying to become what he deems as "better" than how God made him, which essentially was the very cause of the fall. Obviously, there is gray area here, but this helps us make some distinctions. As we see from Paul's statements, the human idea of weakness is not necessarily God's idea of weakness. God's view is that in our weakness Christ is glorified.

## **Notes**

1. Mitchell, George L. "Report to the Commissioner of baseball of an independent investigation into the illegal use of

steroids and other performance enhancing substances by players in major league baseball," Dec. 13, 2007, Office of the Commissioner of Baseball, pg. SR 35-37.

2. [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#) (ESV)

3. [www.steroidabuse.com](http://www.steroidabuse.com)

4. *Anabolic* = metabolic process of building larger muscles from smaller ones, *Androgenic* = production of male traits

5. Mitchell, pg. 7. The complete Mitchell report can be viewed at Major League Baseball's official site: [mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp](http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp)

6. [sports.espn.go.com/specialdesign/steroids/window.html](http://sports.espn.go.com/specialdesign/steroids/window.html)

7. Both Anabolic steroids and human growth hormone (HGH) are legal when used for prescribed medical reasons. Muscle growth or cosmetics is not an FDA approved medical use for either of these drugs.

8. [www.steroidabuse.com/true-stories-of-steroid-abuse.html](http://www.steroidabuse.com/true-stories-of-steroid-abuse.html)

9.

[sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2008/magazine/01/15/sins.of.a.father.0121/index.html](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2008/magazine/01/15/sins.of.a.father.0121/index.html)

10. Mitchell, pg. 16.

11. George Will, *Newsweek*, May 21, 2007, [www.newsweek.com/id/34762](http://www.newsweek.com/id/34762)

12. [Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-16, Proverbs 16:4](#) (ESV)

13. [Romans 12:1,2](#) (ESV)

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# Abuse and Domestic Violence

*Abuse and domestic violence affects our lives, our homes, and our society. Kerby Andersons looks at the problem of abuse and what the church can do to help victims of abuse.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

Each year the lives of women (and men) are altered or destroyed by someone who abuses them. The resulting emotional scars, physical scars, and destruction are evident in social and crime statistics.

Although abuse is significantly under-reported, current crime statistics at least begin to tell the story. The FBI's Uniform Crime Report routinely lists domestic violence as the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44 in the United States. These injuries are more than those from car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

Abuse may be open, flagrant, and in-your-face. But abuse can also be subtle and devious. It may explode on the scene or gradually creep into a relationship. Although women are the primary victims of abuse, men may be victims, also, of abuse.

One of the first steps in dealing with abuse is to identify it. Identifying it is often difficult because it can manifest itself in different forms. Here is a brief survey of the different types of abuse.

- *Emotional abuse* is the use of mental strategies or mind games. This would include such things as anger, aggression, humiliation, intimidation, stalking, fear, power, and control. The goal is to inflict emotional damage on the other person.
- *Physical abuse* would include the use of body parts or weapons to threaten, punish, dominate, restrain, control, or injure another person.

- *Sexual abuse* is the use of forced sexual actions which may dominate, manipulate, threaten, injure, corrupt, or control another person.
- *Social abuse* involves other forms of abuse to dominate, manipulate or control another person's social relationships.
- *Financial abuse* is the use of money or financially-related matters to dominate, threaten or control. This may be done to inflict damage on another person or take financial advantage of that person.
- *Spiritual abuse* is the controlling of another person's religious interests or practices. Spiritual damage may be inflicted by criticizing a person's religious convictions or misstating them for religious purposes.

Although abuse may take various forms, there are often common elements. For example, there often is the tendency to blame the victim of abuse. A woman may be told to "submit" or "pray harder for her marriage" by a pastor or church members. And often women go back into abusive relationships, leaving many to wonder.

In this article, we will try to provide some answers and perspective on this important issue. (And I might note that we already have articles on the Probe Web site dealing with such issues as [verbal abuse](#) and [spiritual abuse](#).)

## **Types of Abusers**

Although abuse and domestic violence are one of the most pressing social problems of our time, most of society (including churches) still view the crisis as a private matter. Abused women are often advised by pastors and members of a congregation to "pray harder" or "try to become a better wife."

Abuse has not only been ignored by the church but often by the medical profession. In their study of abuse, Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft found that out of one million women who sought

medical treatment for injuries sustained by husbands and boyfriends, doctors correctly identified the injuries as a result of battering only four percent of the time.[{1}](#)

Frequently child abuse and domestic violence go hand in hand. Men who abuse their wives will often also abuse their children. Research shows that in homes where domestic violence occurs, children are abused at a rate 1500 percent higher than the normal average.[{2}](#)

Often this abuse begins even before a child is born. One study of 1200 white, Latino, and African-American pregnant women, found that one in six reported physical abuse during pregnancy.[{3}](#)

Researchers now conclude that there are two types of abusers. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman document this in their book, *When Men Batter Women*.[{4}](#) Their study of more than 200 couples in dangerous relationships helped shatter myths and shed new light on abusive relationships.

They describe two types of batterers: Cobras and Pit Bulls. The Cobras are more severely violent of the two. They strike swiftly and ferociously, always remaining in control and feeling entitled to whatever they want.

Pit Bulls are violent because they are insecure. They are more likely to lose control, letting their emotions burn slowly until they explode in anger.

Jacobson and Gottman intensively studied about 60 of the 200 couples by watching videotapes of non-violent arguments of severe batterers and their spouses. To eliminate some of the subjectivity, they also monitored the vital signs (heart rate, sweat flow) of the couples.

They found that Cobras resemble the snake for which they are named. They become still and focused just before striking their victim. They become internally calm during abuse. While

the heart rates of Pit Bulls increase during abuse, the Cobras' heart rates actually decrease.

Pit Bulls are driven by deep insecurity and often have an unhealthy dependence on the mates they abuse. They are afraid of losing their wives and therefore try to control them through physical and emotional abuse. Cobras have often been physically or sexually abused themselves (frequently in childhood) and tend to see violence as an unavoidable part of life.

## **Boundaries**

Often victims of abuse feel they deserve the abuse they receive. They have been convinced (by their partner or perhaps by society in general) that the abuse is their fault. It is not. To reinforce this claim, here are eight things that no one deserves:[\[5\]](#)

- No one deserves to be pushed, slapped, bruised, or kicked. No excuse makes such actions justifiable, whether drugs, alcohol, financial problems or family problems.
- No one deserves to be verbally abused. No one should be called names or yelled at for no apparent reason.
- No one deserves to have possessions damaged (dishes thrown, clothes torn) or gifts destroyed. These things don't automatically become "his" just because he paid for them from a joint checking account.
- No one deserves to be interfered with in coming and going. You do not need to be told when you can or cannot leave the house, go shopping, or go to school.
- No one deserves to be followed, harassed, or spied upon. As an adult, you have the right to go where you want, and spend time the way you choose.
- No one deserves to be ridiculed, put down, made fun of, or belittled. This applies both at home and in

public.

- No one deserves to be emotionally starved. Everyone has emotional needs: to love, to be loved, to care and be cared for, to need others and to be needed by others. This involves more than just one person who is demanding your time and attention.
- No one deserves to be isolated. You deserve to have a community of people around you rather than just a spouse who dominates your life.

Each person has rights that should be asserted to prevent abuse from taking place. Here is a short list of those rights:

- You have the right to be treated with respect. All are created in the image of God (Gen. 2:26-27) and have value and dignity. You deserve respect regardless of your economic status, race, religion, or sex.
- You have the right to be heard. You have ideas and opinions and should be free to express them.
- You have the right to have a support system. You shouldn't have to depend on one person in your life to provide all your emotional needs and who cuts you off from the rest of society.
- You have the right to come and go as you please. You should be able to make choices about what you do with your free time.
- You have the right to have privacy and space of your own. You don't give up those rights when you get married or when you begin to have children.
- You have the right to maintain a separate identity.

Each of these rights are important in establishing boundaries in a relationship. These are key components in preventing abuse.

# Myths of Abuse

Let's turn now to some of the myths of abuse. [{6}](#)

One myth is that victims of abuse come from lower-income families with little education. In reality, victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life. Race, religion, socio-economic background are no predictor of abuse. Victims of abuse may be well-educated or uneducated, professionals or common laborers.

A second myth is that victims stay in abusive relationships because they like being abused. That is simply not true. Many have been conditioned to accept beatings because they are blamed by their abusers, but they do not like being beaten. Many victims actually "accept abuse as common in relationships." [{7}](#)

So, why don't victims leave? The answer to that is often quite complex. Many women believe they cannot leave because "He can't live without me." They may fear he will have a nervous breakdown, commit suicide, or lose his job.

She may believe that the children need a father, rationalizing that an abusive father is better than no father at all. And she may think she cannot make it alone in the job market.

Many women fear they will be killed if they leave an abusive relationship. And that fear may be justified. Studies show that battered women are more likely to be killed *after* leaving an abusive relationship. [{8}](#)

Abuse victims also convince themselves that things are going to get better. Hope springs eternal, and there is always the hope that with the right changes and hard work, abuse will go away. Sadly, it does not.

A third myth is that violence happens mostly between strangers. Contrary to popular belief, a woman's greatest risk

of assault is from an intimate partner. Statistics from the Department of Justice indicate that women are attacked seven times more often by offenders with whom they have an intimate relationship than are male victims of violence.[{9}](#)

A fourth myth is that abuse is not a major problem. Domestic violence is one of the most serious health problems today. As we have mentioned, it affects every socioeconomic segment of society. "Federal officials estimate that domestic violence costs U.S. firms \$4 billion a year in lower productivity, staff turnover, absenteeism, and excessive use of medical benefits."[{10}](#)

## **What the Church Can Do**

Domestic violence is pervasive in our society and crosses all socioeconomic levels, religious belief, and cultural backgrounds. Abuse affects our lives, our homes, and our society. Is there anything the church can do to deal with this important issue? Here are a few suggestions.[{11}](#)

First, pastors and church members should be aware of the extent of the problem. I have provided some social statistics to demonstrate how pervasive abuse is within our society. It isn't a problem to be ignored or addressed through simple clichés.

Second, pastors and counselors need to help abuse victims set boundaries in their lives. Battered women often find it difficult to make choices because someone else has been making decisions for them. Many women who live in violent homes went from their father's house straight to their abuser's house. They never have had much experience in making their own personal choices.

If you are seeking to help an abuse victim, you should encourage her to make her own decisions. Resist the temptation to rescue and take over her life. She needs to feel empowered

not helpless. At the same time, you can provide suggestions about finding a family counselor or a domestic violence agency.

Third, if you are a pastor, a counselor, or just a caring friend, you can provide counsel and comfort. She needs to hear from you that she doesn't deserve to be abused. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, and don't let her convince herself that the abuse will go away.

Fourth, be prepared for crisis intervention. Quick action may be necessary to protect her and her children. Ask her to describe the circumstances of the last two or three beatings. What preceded his attack (drugs, alcohol, argument)? Where is her relationship right now?

A pastor or counselor who receives a crisis call only has a few moments to discern the extent of the threat and appropriate actions that should be taken. Can she find her way to a safe place immediately? Do you have a place for her to go, if necessary?

Sometimes the crisis arrives at your office or home. A pastor, counselor, or caring friend may need to arrange for medical attention and a safe place away from the abuser.

If the couple is separated, she may be stalked by her abuser. She needs to know who can protect her and how to contact legal services.

Fifth, the church should address this important issue of domestic abuse. By speaking to this issue, we break the silence surrounding abuse and confront it with biblical principles. The church should hold batterers responsible for their actions. Intervention, confrontation, and tough love should be tools used to fight abuse in our communities.

If the batterer is a member of the church, then Matthew 18 provides a model for confronting "offenders" within the

church. Galatians 5:22-25 talks about the fruit of the Spirit which includes kindness, gentleness, and self-control. These and many other verses provide a model for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians have an important role in dealing with abuse within our society.

## Notes

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2. Maria Roy, "Children in the Crossfire," *Health Communications*, 1988.
3. Judith McFarlane, "Abuse During Pregnancy: A Cross-Cultural Study of Frequency and Severity of Injuries," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Fact Sheet* (Denver, 1994).
4. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
5. A more detailed list can be found in Mary Marecek, *Breaking Free from Partner Abuse* (Buena Park, Calif: Morning Glory Press, 1999).
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# Drug Abuse – A Biblical Analysis

In the 1960s, the drug culture became a part of American society. But what was once the pastime of Timothy Leary's disciples and the habit of poverty-stricken junkies went mainline to the middle class. A culture that once lived in the safe world of Ozzie and Harriet awoke to the stark realization that even their son Ricky used cocaine.

The statistics are staggering. The average age of first alcohol use is 12, and the average age of first drug use is 13. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 93 percent of all teenagers have some experience with alcohol by the end of their senior year of high school, and 6 percent drink daily. Almost two-thirds of all American young people try illicit drugs before they finish high school. One out of sixteen seniors smokes marijuana daily, and 20 percent have done so for at least a month sometime in their lives. But Americans have changed their minds about drugs. A Gallup poll released on the 20th anniversary of Woodstock showed that drugs, once an integral part of the counterculture, are considered to be the number-one problem in America. Two decades before, young people tied drugs to their "search for peace, love and good times." But by 1989, Americans associated drugs with "danger, crime and despair." A similar conclusion could be found among the nation's teenagers. A Gallup poll of 500 teens found that 60 percent said concern over drug abuse was their greatest fear—outranking fear of AIDS, alcohol, unemployment, and war.

Nationwide surveys indicate that about 90 percent of the nation's youth experiment with alcohol—currently teenagers' drug of choice. An annual survey conducted by the University of Michigan has revealed that over 65 percent of the nation's seniors currently drink, and about 40 percent reported a heavy drinking episode within the two weeks prior to the survey.

Another survey released by the University of Colorado shows that the problem of drug use is not just outside the church. The study involved nearly 14,000 junior-high and high-school youth. It compared churched young people with unchurched young people and found very little difference.

For example, 88 percent of the unchurched young people reported drinking beer compared with 80 percent of churched young people. When asked how many had tried marijuana, 47 percent of the unchurched young people had done so compared with 38 percent of the churched youth. For amphetamines and barbiturates, 28 percent of the unchurched youth had tried them as well as 22 percent of the churched young people. And for cocaine use, the percentage was 14 percent for unchurched and 11 percent for churched youth.

## **Types of Drugs**

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol is the most common drug used and abused. It is an intoxicant that depresses the central nervous system and can lead to a temporary loss of control over physical and mental powers. The signs of drunkenness are well known: lack of coordination, slurred speech, blurred vision, and poor judgment.

The amount of alcohol in liquor is measured by a "proof rating." For example, 45 percent pure alcohol would be 90-proof liquor. A twelve-ounce can of beer, four ounces of wine, and a one-shot glass of 100-proof liquor all contain the same

amount of alcohol.

In recent years, debate has raged over whether alcoholism is a sin or a sickness. The Bible clearly labels drunkenness a sin (Deut. 21:20-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-20), but that does not mitigate against the growing physiological evidence that certain people's biochemistry makes them more prone to addiction.

Some studies suggest that the body chemistry of alcoholics processes alcohol differently than that of non-alcoholics. Acetaldehyde is the intermediate by-product of alcohol metabolism, but the biochemistry of some people make it difficult to process acetaldehyde into acetate. Thus, acetaldehyde builds up in the body and begins to affect a person's brain chemistry. The chemicals produced (called isoquinolines) act very much like opiates and therefore contribute to alcoholism.

Other studies have tried to establish a connection between certain types of personalities and alcoholism. The general conclusion has been that there is no connection. But more recent studies seem to suggest some correlation between personality type and drug abuse. One personality type that seems to be at risk is the anti-social personality (ASP), who is often charming, manipulative, impulsive, and egocentric. ASPs make up 25 percent of the alcohol- and drug-abuse population, yet only comprise about 3 percent of the general population.

The social costs of alcohol are staggering. Alcoholism is the third largest health problem (following heart disease and cancer). There are an estimated 10 million problem drinkers in the American adult population and an estimated 3.3 million teenage problem drinkers. Half of all traffic fatalities and one-third of all traffic injuries are alcohol-related. Alcohol is involved in 67 percent of all murders and 33 percent of all suicides.

Alcohol is also a prime reason for the breakdown of the family. High percentages of family violence, parental abuse and neglect, lost wages, and divorce are tied to the abuse of alcohol in this country. In one poll on alcohol done for *Christianity Today* by George Gallup, nearly one-fourth of all Americans cited alcohol and/or drug abuse as one of the three reasons most responsible for the high divorce rate in this country.

Since the publication of Janet Geringer Woitiz's book *Adult Children of Alcoholics*, society has begun to understand the long-term effect of alcoholism on future generations. Children of Alcoholics (COAs) exhibit a number of traits including guessing what normal behavior is, having difficulty following a project from beginning to end, judging themselves without mercy, and having difficulty with intimate relationships.

The toxic effects of alcohol are also well known: they often cause permanent damage to vital organs like the brain and the liver. Death occurs if alcohol is taken in large enough amounts. When the blood alcohol level reaches four-tenths of 1 percent, unconsciousness occurs; at five-tenths of 1 percent, alcohol poisoning and death occurs.

## **Marijuana**

Marijuana is produced from the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*), which grows well throughout the world. Marijuana has been considered a "gateway drug" because of its potential to lead young people to experiment with stronger drugs such as heroin and cocaine. In 1978, an alarming 10 percent of all high-school seniors smoked marijuana every day. Although that percentage has dropped significantly, officials still estimate that about one-third of all teenagers have tried marijuana.

Marijuana is an intoxicant that is usually smoked in order to induce a feeling of euphoria lasting two to four hours. Physical effects include an increase in heart rate, bloodshot

eyes, a dry mouth and throat, and increased appetite.

Marijuana can impair or reduce short-term memory and comprehension. It can reduce one's ability to perform tasks requiring concentration (such as driving a car). Marijuana can also produce paranoia and psychosis.

Because most marijuana users inhale unfiltered smoke and hold it in their lungs for as long as possible, it causes damage to the lungs and pulmonary system. Marijuana smoke also has more cancer-causing agents than tobacco smoke. Marijuana also interferes with the immune system and reduces the sperm count in males.

## **Cocaine**

Cocaine occurs naturally in the leaves of coca plants and was reportedly chewed by natives in Peru as early as the sixth century. It became widely used in beverages (like Coca-Cola) and medicines in the nineteenth century but was restricted in 1914 by the Harrison Narcotics Act.

Some experts estimate that more than 30 million Americans have tried cocaine. Government surveys suggest there may be as many as 6 million regular users. Every day some 5,000 neophytes sniff a line of coke for the first time.

When the popularity of cocaine grew in the 1970s, most snorted cocaine and some dissolved the drug in water and injected it intravenously. Today the government estimates more than 300,000 Americans are intravenous cocaine users.

In recent years, snorting cocaine has given way to smoking it. Snorting cocaine limits the intensity of the effect because the blood vessels in the nose are constricted. Smoking cocaine delivers a much more intense high. Smoke goes directly to the lungs and then to the heart. On the next heartbeat, it is on the way to the brain. Dr. Anna Rose Childress at the University of Pennsylvania notes that "you can become

compulsively involved with snorted cocaine. We have many Hollywood movie stars without nasal septums to prove that." But when cocaine is smoked "it seems to have incredibly powerful effects that tend to set up a compulsive addictive cycle more quickly than anything that we've seen."

Cocaine is a stimulant and increases heart rate, restricts blood vessels, and stimulates mental awareness. Users say it is an ego-builder. Along with increased energy comes a feeling of personal supremacy: the illusion of being smarter, sexier, and more competent than anyone else. But while the cocaine confidence makes users feel indestructible, the crash from cocaine leaves them depressed, paranoid, and searching for more.

Until recently, people speaking of cocaine dependence never called it an addiction. Cocaine's withdrawal symptoms are not physically wrenching like those of heroin and alcohol. Yet cocaine involves compulsion, loss of control, and continued use in spite of the consequences.

The death of University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias and an article by Dr. Jeffery Isner in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that same year have established that cocaine can cause fatal heart problems. These deaths can occur regardless of whether the user has had previous heart problems and regardless of how the cocaine was taken.

Cocaine users also describe its effect in sexual terms. Its intense and sensual effect makes it a stronger aphrodisiac than sex itself. Research at UCLA with apes given large amounts of cocaine showed they preferred the drug to food or sexual partners and were willing to endure severe electric shocks in exchange for large doses. The cocaine problem in this country has been made worse by the introduction of crack: ordinary coke mixed with baking soda and water into a solution and heated. This material is then dried and broken into tiny chunks that resemble rock candy. Users usually smoke

these crack rocks in glass pipes.

Crack (so-called because of the cracking sound it makes when heated) has become the scourge of the war on drugs. A single hit of crack provides an intense, wrenching rush in a matter of seconds. Because crack is absorbed rapidly through the lungs and hits the brain within seconds, it is the most dangerous form of cocaine and also the most addicting.

Another major difference is not physiological but economic. According to Dr. Mark Gold, founder of the nationwide cocaine hotline, the cost to an addict using crack is one-tenth the cost he would have paid for the equivalent in cocaine powder just a decade ago. Since crack costs much less than normal cocaine, it is particularly appealing to adolescents. About one in five 12th graders has tried cocaine, and that percentage is certain to increase because of the price and availability of crack.

## **Hallucinogens**

The drug of choice during the 1960s was LSD. People looking for the "ultimate trip" would take LSD or perhaps peyote and experience bizarre illusions and hallucinations.

In the last few decades, these hallucinogens have been replaced by PCP (*Phencyclidine*), often known as "angel dust" or "killer weed." First synthesized in the 1950s as an anesthetic, PCP was discontinued because of its side effects but is now manufactured illegally and sold to thousands of teenagers.

PCP is often sprayed on cigarettes or marijuana and then smoked. Users report a sense of distance and estrangement. PCP creates body-image distortion, dizziness, and double vision. The drug distorts reality in such a way that it can resemble mental illness. Because the drug blocks pain receptors, violent PCP episodes may result in self-inflicted injuries.

Chronic PCP users have persistent memory problems and speech

difficulties. Mood disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and violent behavior, are also reported. High doses of PCP can produce a coma that can last for days or weeks.

## **Synthetic Drugs**

The latest scourge in the drug business has been so-called designer drugs. These synthetic drugs, manufactured in underground laboratories, mimic the effects of commonly abused drugs. Since they were not even anticipated when our current drug laws were written, they exist in a legal limbo, and their use is increasing. One drug is MDMA, also known as "Ecstasy." It has been called the "LSD of the '80s" and gives the user a cocaine-like rush with a hallucinogen euphoria. Ecstasy was sold legally for a few years despite National Institute on Drug Abuse fears that it could cause brain damage. In 1985 the DEA outlawed MDMA, although it is still widely available.

Other drugs have been marketed as a variation of the painkillers Demerol and Fentanyl. The synthetic variation of the anesthetic Fentanyl is considered more potent than heroin and is known on the street as "synthetic heroin" and "China White."

Designer drugs may become a growth industry in the '90s. Creative drug makers in clandestine laboratories can produce these drugs for a fraction of the cost of smuggled drugs and with much less hassle from law enforcement agencies.

## **Biblical Analysis**

Some people may believe that the Bible has little to say about drugs, but this is not so. First, the Bible has a great deal to say about the most common and most abused drug—alcohol. Scripture admonishes Christians not to be drunk with wine (Eph. 5:18) and calls drunkenness a sin (Deut. 21:20-21; Amos 6:1; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-20). The Bible also warns of the dangers of drinking alcohol (Prov. 20:1; Isaiah 5:11; Hab.

2:15-16), and, by implication, the dangers of taking other kinds of drugs.

Second, drugs were an integral part of many ancient Near East societies. For example, the pagan cultures surrounding the nation of Israel used drugs as part of their religious ceremonies. Both the Old Testament and New Testament condemn sorcery and witchcraft. In those days, drug use was tied to sorcery (the word translated "sorcery" comes from the Greek word from which we get the English words *pharmacy* and *pharmaceutical*). Drugs were prepared by a witch or shaman. They were used to enter into the spiritual world by inducing an altered state of consciousness that allowed demons to take over the mind of the user. In our day, many use drugs merely for so-called recreational purposes, but we cannot discount the occult connection.

Galatians 5:19-21 says:

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft [which includes the use of drugs]; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The word *witchcraft* here is also translated "sorcery" and refers to the use of drugs. The Apostle Paul calls witchcraft associated with drug use a sin. The non-medical use of drugs is considered one of the acts of a sinful nature. Using drugs, whether to "get a high" or to tap into the occult, is one of the acts of a sinful nature where users demonstrate their depraved and carnal nature. The psychic effects of drugs should not be discounted. A questionnaire designed by Charles Tate and sent to users of marijuana documented some disturbing findings. In his article in *Psychology Today* he noted that one-

fourth of the marijuana users who responded to his questionnaire reported that they were taken over and controlled by an evil person or power during their drug-induced experience. And over half of those questioned said they have experienced religious or "spiritual" sensations in which they met spiritual beings.

Many proponents of the drug culture have linked drug use to spiritual values. During the 1960s, Timothy Leary and Alan Watts referred to the "religious" and "mystical" experience gained through the use of LSD (along with other drugs) as a prime reason for taking drugs.

## **How Parents Can Keep Their Children Off Drugs**

Drugs pose a threat to our children, but parents can protect them from much of this threat by working on the following preventive measures.

An important first step in keeping children off drugs is to build up their self-esteem. Children with a positive self-image stand a better chance against peer pressure. Parents must help their children know they are a special creation of God (Ps. 139: 13-16) and worthy of dignity and respect (Ps. 8).

Parents must help them see the dangers of trying to conform to some group's standards by going along with its drug habits. Kids often think drugs are chic and cool. Parents must show their children that drugs are dangerous and work to counter the clichés of kids who will tempt their children to use drugs.

Second, parents should monitor their children's friendships. Before they allow their children to spend too much time with another child, parents should get to know the other child's family. Does the child come home to an empty house after

school? Is there adult supervision of the children's activities? An unsupervised home often invites drug experimentation.

A third thing parents can do is to promote alternatives to drugs. Schools and church groups should develop "Just Say No" clubs and programs. Parents should provide alternative activities for their children. Sports, school clubs, the arts, and hobbies are all positive alternatives to the negative influence of drugs. At home, children should be encouraged to read books, play on a computer, or be involved in other activities that use the mind.

Fourth, parents should teach their children about drugs. Drug education cannot be left to the schools. Parents have to be personally involved and let their kids know that drugs will not be tolerated. Parents themselves should be educated about drugs and drug paraphernalia.

Fifth, parents must set a good example. Parents who are drug-free have a much better chance of rearing drug-free children. If parents are using drugs, they should stop immediately. The unconditional message to our kids must be that drugs are wrong and they will not be tolerated at home.

## **How Parents Can Recognize Drug Abuse**

Most parents simply do not believe that their child could abuse drugs. But statistics suggest otherwise. Each year, thousands of young people get hooked on drugs and alcohol. Parents must learn to recognize the symptoms of drug abuse.

The organization Straight, Inc., has produced the following checklist of eighteen warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse:

1. School tardiness, truancy, declining grades
2. Less motivation, energy, self-discipline
3. Loss of interest in activities
4. Forgetfulness, short- or long-term

5. Short attention span, trouble concentrating
6. Aggressive anger, hostility, irritability
7. Sullen, uncaring attitudes and behavior
8. Family arguments, strife with family members
9. Disappearance of money, valuables
10. Changes in friends, evasiveness about new ones
11. Unhealthy appearance, bloodshot eyes
12. Changes in personal dress or grooming
13. Trouble with the law in or out of school
14. Unusually large appetite
15. Use of Visine, room deodorizers, incense
16. Rock group or drug-related graphics, slogans
17. Pipes, small boxes or containers, baggies, rolling papers or other unusual items
18. Peculiar odors or butts, seeds, leaves in ashtrays or clothing pockets.

## **What Parents Should Do If Their Children Are on Drugs**

All the preventive measures in the world cannot assure that our children will not experiment with drugs. If parents suspect that their child is already using drugs, the following practical suggestions should be followed.

First, don't deny your suspicions. Drug addiction takes time but occurs much faster with a child than an adult. Some of the newer drugs (especially crack) can quickly lead to addiction. Parents should act on their suspicions. Denial may waste precious time. A child's life may be in danger.

Second, learn to recognize the symptoms of drug abuse. The warning signs listed above are important clues to a child's involvement with drugs. Some readily noticeable physical symptoms include a pale face, imprecise eye movements, and neglect of personal appearance. Some less noticeable symptoms involving social interaction include diminished drive or

reduced ambition, a significant drop in the quality of schoolwork, reduced attention span, impaired communication skills, and less care for the feelings of others.

Third, be consistent. Develop clear rules in the areas of curfew, accountability for an allowance, and where your teen spends his or her time. Then stick with these rules. Consistent guidelines will allow for less opportunity to stumble into sin of any kind. Fourth, open up lines of communication with your child. Ask probing questions and become informed about the dangers of drugs and the potential risk to your child.

Finally, be tough. Fighting drugs takes patience and persistence. Don't be discouraged if you don't make headway right away. Your unconditional love is a potent weapon against drugs.

## **What the Church Can Do about Drug Abuse**

The family must be the first line of defense for drugs, but an important second line should be the church. The church staff and individual members can provide much-needed answers and help to those addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

### **Practical Suggestions for the Church Staff**

First, the pastor and staff must be educated about drug abuse. Substance abuse is a medical problem, a psychological problem, and a spiritual problem. The church staff should be aware of how these various aspects of the problem interrelate.

The pastor should also know the causes, effects, and treatments. He must be aware of the responses of both dependents and co-dependents. Sometimes the abuser's family prevents recovery by continuing to deny the problem.

The church staff can obtain good drug information through the local library and various local agencies. Fortunately more

Christians are writing good material on this issue, so check your local Christian bookstore.

Second, the congregation must be educated. The church should know the facts about substance abuse. This is a worthy topic for sermons and Sunday-school lessons. Ignorance puts young people in particular and the congregation in general at risk. Christians must be armed with the facts to combat this scourge in our nation.

Third, a program of prevention must be put in place. The best way to fight drug abuse is to stop it before it starts. A program that presents the problem of substance abuse and shows the results is vital. It should also provide a biblical framework for dealing with the problem of drugs in society and in the church.

Fourth, the church might consider establishing a support group. The success of non-church-related groups like Alcoholics Anonymous points to the need for substance abusers to be in an environment that encourages acceptance and accountability.

## **Biblical Principles for Counseling Drug Abusers**

In establishing a church program or providing counsel for a substance abuser, we should be aware of a number of biblical principles Christians should apply.

First, Christians should help abusers see the source of their problem. It is not the drink or the drug that is ultimately the problem. Jesus said in Mark 7:19-20 that "whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart." Instead, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man." Evil lies in the human heart, not in the bottle or drug.

Second, Christians must be willing to bear one another's burdens and provide comfort and counseling. Paul says in Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted."

Third, Christians must have an appreciation for the compulsive, irrational, and even violent nature of substance abuse. The Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans noted this tendency in our nature: "For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (7:15).

## **How Society Can Fight the Drug Problem**

In addition to what the family and the church can do, society must fight America's drug epidemic on five major fronts. Each one has to be successful in order to win the overall battle.

The first battlefield is at the border. Federal agents must patrol the 8,426 miles of deeply indented Florida coastline and 2,067-mile border with Mexico. This is a formidable task, but vast distances are not the only problem.

The smugglers have almost unlimited funds and some of the best equipment available. Fortunately, the federal interdiction forces (namely customs, the DEA, and the INS) are improving their capability. Customs forces have been given an increase in officers, and all are getting more sophisticated equipment.

The second battlefield is law enforcement at home. Police must crack down with more arrests, more convictions, longer sentences, and more seizures of drug dealers' assets. Unfortunately, law enforcement successes pale when compared with the volume of drug traffic. Even the most effective crackdowns seem to do little more than move drugs from one location to another.

Drug enforcement officers rightly feel both outgunned and underfunded. In the 1980s, the budget for the city of Miami's vice squad unit for an entire year was less than the cost of just one episode of the TV show *Miami Vice*.

An effective weapon on this battlefield is a 1984 law that makes it easier to seize the assets of drug dealers before conviction. In some cities, police have even confiscated the cars of suburbanites who drive into the city to buy crack.

But attempts to deter drug dealing have been limited by flaws in the criminal justice system. A lack of jail cells prevents significant prosecution of drug dealers. And even if this problem were alleviated, the shortage of judges would still result in the quick release of drug pushers.

A third battlefield is drug testing. Many government and business organizations are implementing testing on a routine basis in order to reduce the demand for drugs.

The theory is simple. Drug testing is a greater deterrent to drug use than the remote possibility of going to jail. People who know they will have to pass a urine test in order to get a job are going to be much less likely to dabble in drugs. In 1980, 27 percent of some 20,000 military personnel admitted to using drugs in the previous 30 days. Five years later, after drug testing was implemented, the proportion dropped to 9 percent.

A fourth battleground is drug treatment. Those who are addicted to drugs need help. But the major question is who should provide the treatment and who should foot the bill. Private hospital programs are now a \$4 billion-a-year business with a daily cost of as much as \$500 per bed per day. This is clearly out of the reach of addicts who do not have employers or insurance companies who can pick up the costs.

A fifth battleground is education. Teaching children the dangers of drugs can be an important step in helping them to

learn to say no to drugs. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that 72 percent of the nation's elementary- and secondary-school children are being given some kind of drug education.

The battle for drugs will continue as long as there is a demand. Families, churches, and the society at large must work to fight the scourge of drugs in our country.

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