

Power Over Drug Abuse

Substance abuse occurs because people want to feel powerful in relationships.

As a therapist, I'm fascinated by TV shows that chronicle the lives of famous people. I learn a lot by watching their journeys through life. One night I got caught up in a series on the self-destruction of rock stars.

Each rock star's rise to fame took a similar path. First there was a major disconnect with family through absence, abuse or tragedy, resulting in an early loss of innocence. Music became an outlet of creativity and expression. A sudden rise in fame was followed by a long and dark journey into drugs, sex and basic self-destruction. The end result was near or actual death.

The pattern was repeated with such regularity that it became old. I kept thinking: Why don't these guys get it? They all make the same mistakes and end up destroyed.

Empty and searching for meaning, they all tried to deal with the powerlessness of their lives in the same way. When they realized that no amount of money, sex or fame could fill the empty spots in their souls, they turned to drugs.

The most striking similarity was the depth of deception involved in the substance abuse. Comments such as, "I'm invincible," "Only one more hit," "I can stop," "This makes me more creative," "I don't care," "I like the feeling," "It helps me relax" and "I'm going to quit" were frequently repeated.

Even when the stars were confronted with the overdose deaths of fellow band members, they continued to use drugs. The power of substances over their lives was incredibly strong.

Suddenly I realized: These rock stars are no different than most people. In fact, these rock stars actually are “most people” who get caught up in something bigger than they can control. They open themselves to wrong influences to fill a void.

The question is, Why, as harmful as these substances are, do so many people turn to them? Don't they know drugs always lead to a dead end? Don't they see the terrible destruction brought on by addiction?

Most people think that substance abuse develops out of a need to escape problems, pain or bad feelings. But our need to escape is universal, so there must be more involved.

I believe substance abuse occurs because people want to feel powerful in interpersonal relationships. Think about it: When someone is drunk or high they wield an incredible amount of power over those around them. They are in charge because everyone's behavior revolves around their altered state.

Although we know people may be predisposed toward substance abuse by factors of heredity, a desire for power helps explain the lure. It was this desire that led to Satan's being ousted from heaven. He saw God's glory, wanted to be like Him and became the enemy of God.

The promise of power was one of the temptations Satan brought before Jesus in the wilderness. Satan offered Jesus the world if He would fall down and worship him. He tried to coerce Jesus into accepting immediate gratification and fame.

The devil uses this formula with all of us. The power he offers is rooted in the acquisition of temporal things on which the world places great value—fame, control, money, sex and more.

But his power comes with a price—ultimate destruction of the soul. Substance abuse destroys. It is not a long-term solution

for anything.

Satan takes those who are suffering and feeling inadequate and powerless in their lives and gives them a false sense of power. Ask any substance abuser: There is an initial feeling of power when you take drugs.

Eventually the addiction takes hold, and what you thought you had power over has power over you. That's why the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous is to admit your powerlessness.

In order to overcome any addiction, you must begin with the belief that only God can fix your feelings of inadequacy. Refuse to be tempted by anything the world offers as a solution to your emptiness. Don't allow yourself to be deceived. The only real power is that of the cross.

Remember: The cross means victory. When Jesus died, He triumphed over deception, destruction and death. And in your weakness, He is made strong. Linda S. Mintle, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical social worker based in Chicago. The author of *Getting Unstuck* (Creation House), she welcomes your questions about relationships and emotional problems.