

How You Can Help Combat America's Overdose Epidemic?

According to numbers released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. overdose deaths hit an all-time record in 2020, killing more than 93,000 people. That's over a quarter of the number of deaths due to COVID-related illness. How do we, as the Christian leaders, help combat this growing epidemic?

I recently spoke about this with one of Alabama's leading voices on the topic, founder and executive director of Big Fish Ministries, Isaac Stooksberry. Once a drug addict himself who found freedom in Christ, he called addiction "the plague of our time." Overdose numbers don't even account for the addiction-related imprisonments, divorces and overall brokenness of lives.

Here's what I learned about how impassioned, everyday people can be leaders in bringing people into recovery and wholeness. Leaders need to welcome and show Christ's love to people in addiction. There's so much in Scripture about "setting captives free" (Luke 4), "freedom in Christ" (Gal. 5), "new creations" (2 Cor. 5) and "caring for the least of these" (Matt. 25), all of which could be applied to the mandate of the Great Commission.

Addiction is very often shameful and people with addictions often feel like they wouldn't be accepted by "church people." Embracing and loving the broken is the first step in showing them the Gospel of Jesus, leading them out of darkness.

Leaders don't need to be intimidated by addiction or recovery. Substance abuse can be foreign and can make addicts do irrational things. Yet leading someone through recovery looks like leading anyone out of a sinful lifestyle into a life of discipleship.

Addiction is a symptom of a deeper problem and that problem is usually hopelessness. Jesus is hope for the hopeless and walking someone through recovery is often simply offering Christlike accountability and grace.

Leaders can help bring true freedom and transformation to people with addictions. It takes work but we can put in the

effort to familiarize ourselves with nearby recovery resources. You can meet with your pastor about starting or partnering with local churches to host missional outreaches like “Celebrate Recovery” groups. You can volunteer with local recovery ministries. You can support other leaders in this area through your finances and prayer.

If someone says, “I’m addicted, can you help me?” we should be able to respond with a resounding yes!

Secular programs can help with chemical dependency on drugs but we’re looking for transformation. It’s on us as the church to lead others in becoming fully devoted disciples. Jesus is the only hope for healing our epidemic.

To listen to or watch my full interview with Isaac Stooksberry, visit [Subscribe to the Pinnacle Leaders Podcast](#) with Dr. Langley to listen to this episode and others for more biblical wisdom on the areas of lordship, leadership and lifestyle. {eoa}

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