

Just Pray No!

After teaching junior high school in New York City for decades, Steven Sherman was losing hope for his students amid the drug-related violence that plagued Manhattan. Then he read a news article about an 11-year-old boy who refused to smoke crack with the neighborhood bully. The bully hit him in the head with a shovel, dragged him into a basement, tied him to a radiator and set him on fire. The boy escaped, but 80 percent of his body was burned.

“I cried and cried. I said to the Lord, ‘How can we just say no?’ It’s not working,” Sherman recalls. “All the educational programs and even the first lady Nancy Reagan’s anti-drug campaign were not helping to stem the tide of addiction. The Lord, in the still quiet voice of the Spirit, spoke to me audibly. He said, ‘Just pray no!’ This message burned in my bones.”

It burned in his bones so much, in fact, that he launched the first Just Pray NO! to drugs Worldwide Weekend of Prayer and Fasting on April 7, 1991, to unite Christians worldwide in intercessory prayer on behalf of the addicted and their families. Just Pray NO! has become the battle cry of a prayer movement working behind the scenes to set captives free.

“I wanted Christians to unite in spiritual warfare to battle addiction,” Sherman says. “The task was ambitious. I had a vision for a worldwide day of prayer and concern. I believed that God would honor my simple prayer asked in faith. I prayed that the message of ‘Just Pray NO!’ to drugs would be heard around the world.”

Sherman is tackling a growing problem. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the use of all illegal drugs rose in 2009. What’s more, 21.8 million Americans ages 12 and older—or 8.7 percent

of the population—told researchers they had used illegal drugs in the last month. SAMHSA estimates about 22 million in the U.S. are addicted to illegal drugs. Prescription drugs are also a major part of the problem.

“What do Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Heath Ledger and Corey Haim have in common?” Sherman asks. “They all died from drug overdoses. Opioid analgesics are drugs that are usually prescribed to treat pain. Poisoning death rates involving opioid analgesics have more than tripled in the U.S. since 1999, according to the Centers for Disease Control.”

Sherman is working to enlist 1 million prayer warriors worldwide to join the battle. Vincent Buonfiglio, pastor of Pillars of Faith Tabernacle in Flushing, N.Y., partners with Just Pray NO! through Victorious Overcomers Support Group Substance Abuse Ministry. The Christ-centered organization has an 89 percent success rate.

“Prayer is a vital part of setting people free from drug addiction,” says Buonfiglio, whose program runs in more than 20 locations. “Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. I’ve seen ... lives changed. People are not just getting free of drugs or alcohol, but also ... other issues.”

Sherman didn’t believe in miracles 21 years ago. But after reading about the 11-year-old boy’s courageous stance against drugs—and after launching an effectual fervent prayer movement—he’s convinced that God is answering the cries of Just Say NO! intercessors.

“Deliverance from spiritual bondage can only be achieved by spiritual weapons such as prayer and fasting,” Sherman says. “True victory is only found in the finished work of Christ on the cross and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The saving and transforming message of the gospel is what keeps me going.”