

Why COVID-19 Restrictions Are Killing Those in Addiction Recovery

Emily Heggens was the second person to graduate from the Calvary Chapel of Bangor, Maine, residential discipleship program. Sixteen years after winning her battle with addiction, Emily wrote about her journey and the fundamental importance of God's Word as a part of addiction recovery.

Emily initially turned to drugs "for fun." But the "fun" turned deadly.

"Nothing was ever enough," Emily says, "I had to find more in any way I could. I became a thief, and a manipulator, a liar, a cheater, I failed out of college, lost many jobs, caused division in my family, and lost friends. ... I lost myself. Praise God He saw me and intervened, in the depths of my despair I cried out to Him, and He answered."

Emily moved into Calvary Chapel's residential discipleship program, and her life changed for good. Emily writes:

"Scared and empty, I walked into that door; when my parents left, I crumbled, but I was where God wanted me. He met me there, through the many ladies who poured themselves out on all of us who were there. I learned again about the love of God toward us all and I learned about surrender. Though far from perfected, I graduated the program. This was all just the beginning of my walk with the Lord. ...

"It's by the grace of God that I walk with Him, because He leads me and has taught me to know the sound of His voice and to seek Him in all things. I have so many new testimonies of what God has done in my life since this moment 16 years ago, but I felt like today I needed to share about my drug

addiction in hope that it will give someone out there struggling a hope. No matter how far away you feel and no matter how bad you think you are, God is waiting for you, and He can and will restore the years that have been eaten up."

Pastor Ken Graves grew up with an alcoholic father who left the family poor. God used Ken's brokenness to start a church in his home that is now Calvary Chapel of Bangor. One of the ministries of this amazing church includes a year-long residential discipleship recovery program.

On campus, there are homes for men and women like Emily. This program takes them through the entire Bible in one year. At any given time, Calvary Chapel houses 48 people "relearning life" by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Recovering Addicts Community and Millions More in Danger Because of Lockdowns

In Maine, Gov. Janet Mills decreed that churches may offer food, shelter and counseling—including addiction recovery counseling—to any number of people. But she once banned, and now severely restricts, worship.

It sounds outrageous, but it is true.

In Maine, counseling for substance abuse is permitted without numerical limitation—even in churches—but Bible study and worship at one time were banned and are still severely limited to no more than 50 people—no matter the size of the building.

Worship and Bible study are fundamentally necessary to the addiction recovery program. At first, when Graves faced a total ban on in-person worship, he defied the orders and risked arrest and fines. Even now, with just the 48 residents, the group exceeds the 50-person limit with the pastoral staff. Yet, in-person worship is just as essential to those not in the residential program.

People Are Dying

According to the CDC, the U.S. recorded the highest number ever of overdose deaths in 2020. More than 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred during the pandemic shutdowns, the most ever recorded during a 12-month period—and emergency-room doctors say that number is growing daily.

Dr. Jessica Knopp, an Indiana University Health emergency medicine physician, said: “It’s huge. It’s very distressing. The people we see in the ER for overdose are from all walks of life and all ages. There isn’t a demographic that is not affected.”

According to the American Medical Association, 30 states have been hit the hardest by substance abuse overdoses during the pandemic. If these rates continue, the U.S. will shatter all previous overdose and suicide records.

The COVID shutdowns have bankrupted family businesses, increased poverty, destroyed jobs and livelihoods while isolating people from their strongest support systems, creating a perfect storm of stress pushing people back into addiction.

But studies show that churches have the answer.

Studies show that regular churchgoers are the only groups whose mental health did not decline in 2020. That is why our fight for the church is so important. Our fight for religious freedom is really a fight to save America. {eo}

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