

ALCOHOL AND DRUG DEPENDENCE TEN – NARCOTICS

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(This is based on belief in God. If that offends you, stop reading now)

In this presentation, we look at narcotics, the first of two drugs most likely to kill you. Recently preaching in a jail service in a facility new to me, I mistakenly used heroin addiction as an example of using narcotics to escape reality. Since I try to focus on hope instead of condemnation, I was horrified to glance up from notes and find most of my congregation of women in tears. It was only at that point I learned, heroin was the drug of choice in the area where I had moved, and the reason behind many of their incarcerations. It was when I stopped to ask if anyone wanted prayer, that I received the most troublesome request. (To be continued)

General Description of Drugs in this Class:

There are five types of narcotics. Opiates come from Asian poppies and are used medically to relieve pain. Morphine is a highly effective painkiller, affecting the central nervous system. It doesn't block pain messages, just makes it so we don't care. It is powerful and highly addictive. Codeine was once thought to be an impurity in morphine. It has since been used as a cough suppressant and mild pain reliever and is not excessively addictive. Heroin is a synthetic derivative of morphine, ten times more powerful and extremely addictive. It produces an intense mental release and the mind begins demanding more as soon as the high recedes. Synthetics that imitate opiates are just as addictive and abused. Mixing alcohol with any narcotic can be deadly.

Common Street Names: Heroin is known as "H", horse, monkey on my back. Oxycodone is also called Oxy, Hillbilly Heroin, Percs, O.C., Rims, Tires and Greenies. Hydrocodone has names like Vike, Bananas, Fluff and Hydros. Morphine shows up as Miss Emma, Monkey, White Stuff and M. Codeine street names are Lean, Captain Cody, Little C and Schoolboy. Methodone arrives as Tootsie Roll, Red Rock, Mud and Dolls. Tramadol is Chill Pills, Trammies and Ultras. Heroin is known as Black Tar, Black Pearl, Black, China White, Dope, White Girl, White Horse, Brown Sugar, White Lady, Smack, Snow and Snowball. A mix of heroin and cocaine is called a Speedball.

How Narcotics Affect Users:

The more powerful narcotics cause long-lasting highs and intense euphoria by flooding the brain with large amounts of dopamine. They also bind to opiate receptors in the brain, spinal cord and other locations in the body to block the perception of pain. Opiates can cause feelings of well-being, but they also produce side effects like nausea, confusion and drowsiness.

Legitimate Medical Uses:

A primary medical use for narcotics is effective pain relief or pain masking. Others include use in cough syrups or other drugs to slow down muscle spasms.

Reasons Behind Narcotic Use

One powerful reason for use is to mask physical pain, so many addictions begin with prescribed painkillers. Once addiction has resulted, the drugs are taken to avoid very painful and dangerous withdrawal symptoms. Some sample narcotics from curiosity, a kind of consumer culture. Some actually do so because of peer pressure at the time. But many use them because they offer a serious escape from a personal world full of problems and pressures.

Consequences for Abuse of Narcotics

Physical Health

Besides their effect on the mind, narcotics use can lead to infection of the heart lining and valves, skin abscesses, and congested lungs. Non-sterile syringes and solutions cause liver disease, tetanus and hepatitis. Women users can suffer anemia, heart disease, diabetes, pneumonia or hepatitis during pregnancy and childbirth, with more abortions, breech deliveries, C sections, premature births and stillbirths. Their newborns may from withdrawal symptoms.

Mental Health

Long-term use of opioids causes changes to the prefrontal cortex and medial temporal lobe of the brain. These areas control and regulate long-term memory, decision-making, thought processes and social behaviors.

Probability of Addiction / Dependence

Tolerance develops very quickly and users are driven to increase doses to keep feeling good. Addiction sets in quickly with many of these drugs, because they directly stimulate our brain's pleasure centers. Withdrawal symptoms are very painful and feared.

Social or Societal Consequences

User desperation allows dealers to charge very high prices, leading to poverty, loss of employment and subsequent criminal activities to continue financing their habit.

Legal Consequences

Illegal to use or sell without a prescription, dealers will get serious time in prison.

The Trap Associated With Narcotics Use

Things are not going well for Rachel. She made a poor decision years ago and is thoroughly addicted to heroin. She needs to get free of it, because she is facing a decision on which reality to occupy.

One side effect is damage to the circulatory system. In Rachel's case, her arms where she injects have deteriorated from chemical and blood poisoning, leaving open sores and septis. If she doesn't stop using, they need to amputate her arms to save her. She must choose between a world with arms and no heroin, or reality without arms.

Doctors were able to save Rachel. Moreover, she is also free from heroin, since you can't inject yourself without arms.

There is an old story of a freezing snake. Although initially fearful, the snake finally convinced a man on the trail to pick him up and put him in his shirt, so the snake wouldn't freeze to death. He promised he would never harm his benefactor. Out of compassion, the man helped the reptile. Once warm, the snake bit him. As the man lay dying, watching the snake slither away, he heard it say, "You knew what I was when you picked me up."

Narcotics are like a snake we take up into our bosom. Usually willingly, because of some level of pain. Knowing what narcotics historically do to us, why do we pick them up?



The Rest of the Story:

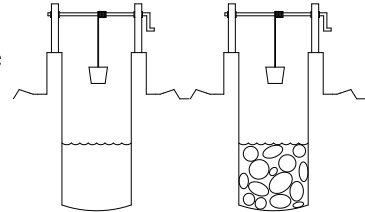
In the jail service mentioned earlier, a woman somewhat older than the rest, who had picked up a snake years before, made this request for prayer.

“I have been a heroin addict for many years. To support my habit, I got my daughter addicted to it. She got my granddaughter using it. My granddaughter overdosed and died yesterday, and I can’t even be there for her funeral. I would just like for you to pray that God would kill me for what I’ve done.”

I couldn’t pray that prayer. All I could do was try to show her a better way.

A Practical Application:

In this illustration, the well represents the source of the time and energy we have to give to those who need us. The water represents our lives. We are the source of blessings from which those we love should be able to draw. But when we fill our lives up with our own pursuits of pleasure (the rocks) pretty soon there’s no blessings left to give. We can’t dip from a life we’ve filled with ourselves, spent on yet one more high that cost us one more job or lost more of, to one more violation of probation. Use of narcotics and subsequent addiction, will quickly consume all of our available life.



A Historical Application:

When we first meet Gomer, she’s a hooker. She’s the one men visit at night and women mock and scorn during the day. She endures the shame, knowing she could retaliate with a few secrets and bring them to her level. But she can’t afford to lose customers if she wants to eat. If she had heroin available, she’d probably take it.

Instead, God offers her the love of a good man. God commands his prophet Hosea, to marry Gomer as an example of God’s love toward Israel. The town prostitute becomes the preacher’s wife, living in a respectable home and bearing three respectable children. Then she once again chooses another reality.

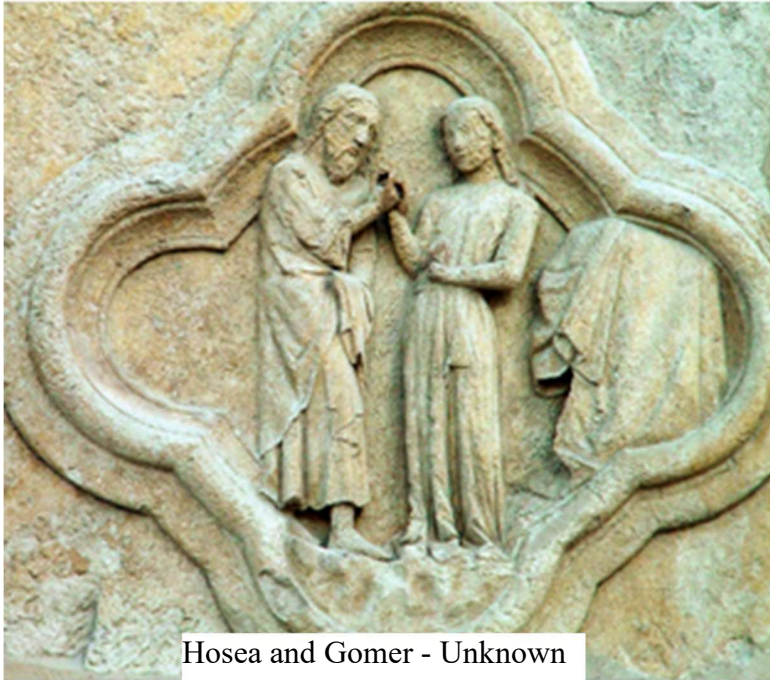
The next thing we hear about Gomer, she’s left Hosea to again work as a prostitute. Was she bored and missed dangerous liaisons with unknown men? Did she miss being a prize men would pay to possess? Perhaps she felt unworthy of the love and respect of a good man? We’re not told why. We just know her choice resulted in her on the auction block, being sold as a slave.

Hosea makes a choice now, the same one God makes when confronted by our unfaithfulness. God chooses to rescue us and pay for our mistakes, so we won’t have to. Hosea buys Gomer from the auction to again be his wife. He takes her back into his world.

Trying Out a Better Way:

When I think about Rachel, I get angry, but mostly at myself. I wish I could’ve met her and told her. “Whatever has gone wrong in your life, there’s a God who said, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, ... thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” I could have mentioned that God created her for a beautiful purpose. When she was looking for freedom, I wish I could have said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Mentioned a God who gives us power to overcome. I wish I could’ve made her believe all that, before she had to decide which terrible world to inhabit.

I can’t help Rachel, but I would like to say all who face the demon of narcotic addiction. Rachel’s story has been written, but yours is not yet played out. There’s more than one reality from which to choose. If you’re not happy with yours, I would heavily recommend the one available through the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Hosea and Gomer - Unknown

