



LIVING LIBERATED

**Are we bound forever to vices,
bad habits, addictions, and
other sins that shackle and put
us in bondage?**

**Today we can learn HOW to free
ourselves from that bondage by
the power of Jesus Christ!**

Steve Flatt

FREEDOM FROM CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

Freedom From Chemical Dependency

A preacher looked out on his 300-member congregation. Each parishioner is characterized by a smiling face, nice clothes, combed hair, and polished teeth. The preacher had just preached a strong sermon on the Christian lifestyle, including a recitation on the evils of drinking and a passionate admonition to his people to totally abstain from the occasional use even of alcohol or stronger drugs.

Concluding his lesson, he looks over the crowd assuming deep in his heart that maybe a few would imbibe upon occasion, but he feels sure that none of his members have a serious problem with drinking or with drugs. Little does he realize, halfway back on the left there sits Mike. Mike is a 24-year-old medical student who teaches the high school Bible class. He serves on the mission committee and everybody admires him for his zeal and his work and his dedication. But what nobody knows is that Mike's father lives in another town and he's an alcoholic, and that Mike is compulsively driven to achieving greater and greater accomplishments in a vain attempt to gain his father's approval and to raise his own self esteem. Everybody in the church thinks that Mike has it together. They think he has a healthy, vital relationship with God. But what they don't see is a profound sense of worthlessness that's driving Mike to an ulcer.

Four rows behind Mike, there are Clarence and Sharon. Sharon attends faithfully while Clarence only comes about once a month. The preacher knows Clarence is an awfully successful businessman. He's heard he earns well into six figures, what he doesn't know is that Clarence is an alcoholic. And when he gets drunk, he gets mean, violent and beats Sharon.

Across the aisle there's Tim and Allison, and their little daughter Amanda. The preacher has heard they're having trouble, even separated for a while. Just this week, he got wind that Tim may be having a hard time at the job. He has no idea that it's all due to Tim's cocaine binges every two weeks.

Then on the third row, down front on the right, there's sweet little Emma. A widow now, Emma was a charter member of the local congregation when it began 47 years ago. Always faithful in attendance, Emma started missing some services lately, friends noticed her hands shook. And they feared that she was suffering in the early stages of Parkinson's disease. Little did they know that her shaking hands came from temporary withdrawal from prescription pain medication that she began taking two years ago, following a minor surgery, prescriptions that she had repeatedly refilled by lying to her doctor and deceiving her pharmacist.

On the back row, there's Marvin, whose 12-year-old son was killed by a drunk driver. Across the way, two teens who vandalized the area school after they had drunk beer and smoked pot. The list goes on and on and on. Now folks the names that I presented to you are purely hypothetical, but the scenarios that I just shared with you are real. They and hundreds of others are repeated in this and every church in America. Chemical dependency and drug abuse are plaguing our country and destroying millions of lives. Five out of 12 people have had their lives touched by chemical dependency.

Now let's stop a few moments and consider what we're talking about. What do we mean by chemical dependency? Chemical dependency is defined as the state that results from the process of increasingly turning to chemical use to meet life's needs. In other words, the chemical may be alcohol, the most prevalent, dangerous, costly, deadly drug in our culture. It may be nicotine, cocaine, crack, heroine, amphetamines, morphine, tranquilizers or any number of prescription drugs., If there is a reliance on some chemical substance to make it through life, the day, the week or to meet life's needs; whatever the substance may be, that's called chemical dependency. It may mean having a drink a day. It may mean having to have several drinks every two hours. It may mean an evening tranquilizer so you can get to sleep. It may mean a cocaine binge every other weekend. That's chemical dependency.

Chemical dependency often leads to a physical addiction. Now look at that definition, let's understand what we're talking about. Physical addiction occurs when the cells of the body change the way they function because of the use of certain substances. A physical addiction literally means you are physiologically altered and your body craves that chemical in order to function.

The tragedy of those two things is chemical dependency invariably fails to meet the life needs that the user is seeking to meet. Let's not lie about it. A fix of something to a drug user feels good initially. That's why they take it. There is a pleasure. But over just a short period of time, that chemical begins to isolate those people, isolate them from God, from others they love, and from the things that really can meet their life's needs. After a period of chemical dependency physical addiction begins and physical addiction is a death process. Sometimes it's slow, often fast, but always fatal unless the cycle is broken, and that seldom occurs.

How devastating is the dependency and abuse problem?

It is a catastrophe.

Statistics from the Alcohol and Drug Council of Middle Tennessee show that in Nashville Tennessee drugs are involved in 50 percent of all spouse abuse, 50 percent of all traffic fatalities, 35 percent of all suicides, 62 percent of all assaults, 52 percent of all rapes, 49 percent of all murders, alcohol or chemical addiction involved, 38 percent of all child abuse, 68 percent of all manslaughters, and 69 percent of all drownings.

But the one that really blew me away was a 1994 Tennessean article that said in Metro Nashville, more than 80 percent of the locally sentenced felons are because of an offense related to drugs. Now let that sink in. If it weren't for drugs, you could take four out of every five convicted felons out of jail in our community. It is destroying lives, it's destroying families.

It's wiping us out.

It's the tool that's Satan is using to just kill us. Nationwide in 1960, in our country there were fewer than 30,000 arrests for drug-related offenses. In 1990, there were over one million. Today, 1994, American prison cells are filled with drug dealers, addicts, alcohol abusers and the mentally ill, often mentally ill because of substance abuse.

Some people tend to say, "Well, let's just put more of them in prison." We've already got four million of them in prison right now.

Today, America has the highest incarceration percentage of any industrialized country in the world. Five hundred and nineteen of every 100,000 U.S. citizens are in prison; 80 percent of that because of drugs. Compare America to Canada which has 116 for every 100,000 and in Japan only 36 for every 100,000. Drug-related cases are so epidemic that our nation's courtrooms are becoming impotent.

Medically in our country, drugs are costing us \$75 billion a year; and half a million newborns every year. This one breaks my heart. A half-a-million newborns every year are exposed to drugs during pregnancies. Crack babies that were a rarity just a decade ago may crowd and fill \$2,000-a-day pediatric wards today. It is a catastrophe.

Specific causes.

The cause did not start as an epidemic; it goes back to one on one. Why do people mess with drugs? What's the whole root? You already know them.

Peer pressure - This pressure particularly affects young people. Their curiosity wants to know what it's all about. Some people like to play with fire. I don't know why, but they do.

Pain - Every alcoholic is seeking to relieve pain. It's the number one reason for drinking. It may be emotional, physical or psychological. But pain is a reason.

Lack of self-worth and self-esteem - Young people who turn to drugs are typically the ones who are most insecure. Oh, some of them are big and bold and a lot of bravado, but you when cut through that, they're the ones who are insecure. Adults are the same way. The whole idea of the cocktail party is the idea that I can't relate in my natural state but give me a little chemical and I'll loosen up. I'll be acceptable, I've got self-worth.

Root cause.

Some of you are going to think this is simplistic, but this is the truth. The root cause of the epidemic goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve chose to sin, they lost life. They lost real life meaning they not only lost an endless quantity of life on what was then a perfect earth, they lost a quality of life. Prior to that point, they didn't know what pain was, they didn't know what frustration was, they didn't know what worry was. They didn't know what it was to be sad. They had absolute meaning in life. But when they sinned, they lost it, and they lost it for all of us. For centuries, men and women have been trying to get it back. We tried drugs, money, power, work, play, religion, and 1,001 other things.

Core message.

There is only one thing that will recapture the real life that was lost in the Garden of Eden, it's Jesus Christ.

Jesus often talked about being life? He said, "*I am the bread of life,*" (John 6:48) "*I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life,*" (John

14:6), "I have come, so that they might have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:10) and "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) Eleven different times in the gospel accounts, Jesus said, "I am life." He's the life we lost. A genuine relationship with Jesus is the only thing that can replace what was lost in Eden. Using anything else to try to fill that void is sin.

Sin

Do you know what the word, "sin," means? In the Hebrew, it means "to miss the mark." It was used of an archer who missed the mark. By the way, I hear this question all the time. Is alcoholism a sin, or is it a disease? Is chemical dependency a sin, or is it a disease? It is always asked as if it has to be an either/or answer. The truth is, it's both. It's BOTH! It is sin, like materialism, or greed, or workaholism, or a thousand other things, it totally misses the mark in the quest for real life. That's sin, but so are a lot of others. But it becomes a disease once chosen and frequented. Those chemical substances rack and ravage the body literally beyond the individual's control.

For about 10 percent of our population that are alcoholics, once they start to drink, the combination of their physical, their psychological make-up, and the power of the drug, makes it virtually impossible for them to stop by sheer willpower. Something will have to intervene. For us to look piously at a person who's an alcoholic and say "Quit drinking" would be like telling a drowning man "Start swimming." Both of them would if they could. They can't.

Enslavement

The psychological and physical addictive powers of drugs are incredible. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, the Corinthians were saying "Everything is permissible for me, everything is permissible." They were misusing their freedom. Paul says "*Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*" Read that last point again, "I will not be mastered by anything." The fact is those who fool with drugs, become fools. They will be mastered by those substances to where they will have to have a snort, a fix, a drink, a smoke, a pill or a shot, whatever.

Paul says we're slaves either to sin or we're slaves to God. "I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves." Now we don't admit that, but every one of us is weak. We're weak as kittens. "*Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*" (Romans 6:19) He says, don't offer yourselves that way. But I'll tell you something about the drug enslavement. Here's the key: Satan, if you'll remember in John 8:44, is called by Jesus a liar, and the father of all lies. Do you know what Satan tells the chemically dependent, and those of you out there who are chemically dependent? Do you know what he's telling you? He's telling you over and over again, you can stop anytime you want to. Do you know what the chemically dependent do? They'll stop for a little while, just to give themselves a false proof that they can do it. But they can't.

There are 18 million alcoholics in America today, just one drug, 18 million alcoholics. Only 15 percent are seeking help. Do you know why only three million seek help? It is because the other 15 million believe the lie. They believe the lie that they've mastered the drug, when the drug has mastered them.

The cure

Will power can't do it. Is it an absolutely endless cycle? No, there is a cure for the dependent person.

1. Realize the inadequacy and destructiveness of drug abuse.

First, he or she must realize the inadequacy and the destructiveness of drug abuse. The person must come to a point that if they continue on their present course, it would be more painful than recovering. In other words, the person has to realize that he or she is chemically dependent. The first step of the 12-step program developed by Alcoholics Anonymous is (and this is the foundation): When an individual will come and say in the presence of others, "I admit I am powerless over alcohol and that my life has become unmanageable." Until they are willing to admit that there's no help. When they admit that, the door becomes open.

2. Believe that Christ can fill the void in life.

He or she must believe that Christ can fill the void in life. You say, what void? The void we talked about earlier. The void created when sin entered the world, the void that drug and chemicals are trying to fill in the first place just to help you get through the day, to get over the pain or to give you the high. They don't do it, but Jesus does. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

This isn't a new thing, it goes back 2,000 years when Paul said in Ephesians 5:18, "*Don't get drunk on wine.*" There's the alcohol drug. He said, that doesn't fill the void. "But instead, be filled with the Spirit." What's he talking about? He's talking about the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit that God lets dwell in you when you come to Christ. By the way, the second step in Alcoholics Anonymous is to say, "I have come to believe in a power greater than myself that can restore me to sanity." They're right, only I'll go further. The source of that power is Jesus Christ. He and He alone will ultimately restore you to sanity.

3. Become part of a healing community.

The dependent person becomes part of a healing community. A "healing community," can be the AA, the NA or another support group. But I want you to hear this and hear this well. We are not just talking to dependent folks, we're talking to a lot of people who are part of a family, you become codependent. A chemically dependent person will not get well on their own. Did you hear that? A chemically dependent person will not get well on their own. They will not identify the problem on their own. They will not seek help on their own. They will not stay the course of recovery alone. That's why God was so wise when he said in Ecclesiastes 4:9-11, "*two are better than one. Because if one is walking alone and falls down, there's nobody to pick him up. But if there are two and one falls down, he's got somebody to pick him up.*"

Recovery from chemical dependency is a lifelong process. That's why alcoholics who've been sober for 10 years can still be seen attending AA meetings because the dependent person has to become part of a healing community. Now I want to say something to church folks. Folks, that ought to be the church. Do you hear me? It's a shame that a program like Alcoholics Anonymous didn't rise up in churches, but outside of them.

In 1978 in a Gallup Poll, one out of four Americans admitted having a personal alcohol problem. But only eight percent said they would turn to the church or its trained personnel if they or a family member had a drinking problem; only eight percent. See, we've done an awfully good job pointing out that chasing a drug is wrong, we've not done a very good job of trying to extend a hand and saying, "Here's how you get it right. Here's how you get it fixed." We've got to do both.

Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brother, if anyone is caught in a sin, ye who are spiritual restore him gently.*" And then the next verse says, "You carry one another's burdens." And the word there means a prolonged journey, not just saying, "You ought to quit that." Get the burden and put it on your back and carry with them over the long haul.

4. Be open and honest about manipulation, lying and rationalization.

The dependent person must become open and honest about his manipulation, his lying, and his rationalization because every drugdependent person goes through that. They lie to everybody.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) He's got to come clean. It frees his spirit.

5. Relearn healthy living skills.

The dependent person relearns healthy living skills.

6. The family's part.

- a) Maintain agape love for the addict, for the dependent. That means a love that seeks the best for them, never gives up, but it does what's best.
- b) Don't aid or abet the dependent behavior. Don't fuel the fire. You keep the agape love. Be like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He didn't keep sending money. He knew the boy had to come to his senses; he had to come home.
- c) Confront carefully. You do have to confront at times. They will not get well alone. You've got to show them what's happening to their lives. Do you know how many confrontations it takes on the average for a dependent person to seek recovery? Fifty-four, yes 54. If you're living with an alcoholic, if you're living with a drug addict and you have tried over and over again to help them find the help they need to get well, take some heart in that statistic.

If you're chasing anything to give you real meaning in life other than Jesus, you're missing the mark. It may be your job, it may be play, it may be your pocketbook; or whatever. If you are chemically dependent today, I hope you're at the point where you'll say in the presence of somebody right now, your family, or a small group, "My life has become unmanageable, and I am powerless to change it."

Until you do, you'll continue to be enslaved.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1202

Questions:

1. Chemical dependency is the process of increasingly turning to chemical use to meet life's needs.

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True

False

2. Chemical dependency never leads to physical dependency.

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True

False

3. Why do people mess with drugs?

-

Peer pressure

-

Pain

-

Lack of self-worth

-

All the above

4. The root cause of chemical dependency is

-

One is created that way

-

Society

-

Hunger

-

Sin

5. One can stop being dependent any time they wish

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True

False

6. To free and heal from chemical dependency one has to:

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Realize the inadequacy and destructiveness of drug abuse

-

Believe that Christ can fill the void in life

-

Become a part of a healing community

-

Become open and honest about manipulation, lying and rationalization

-

Relearn healthy living skills

-

All the above

7. Family love will confront chemical dependency but will not fund it

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True

False

8. How many confrontations does it take before a person dependent on chemicals will seek recovery?

-

24

-

54

-

84

-

104

-

1004

Answer to Questions

1. True
2. False
3. All the Above
4. Sin
5. False
6. All the Above
7. True
8. 54