

THE PERILS OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

A Brief Guide for Parents
Dr Jonathan Adams

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Michael Woodcock

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Peter Baylis

FOREWORD

Drug abuse has become a common and worrying aspect of life in today's society in the UK. It is important for parents and any who have the care of young people to be aware of the problem and the signs to watch out for. We thank our Brother Adams for his clear and helpful addition to this revised issue.

The second and third articles are taken from talks given in Birmingham in September 1993 by two brethren who have had first-hand experience of addiction and its attendant miseries. We are grateful to our two brethren for their candid accounts of their troubles and how they were restored.

These reports may seem appalling to some readers because of the manner of life described, but we hope that they may help prevent others from starting on such a downward and degrading path. Those who have such problems should be given our care and compassion, that we may 'Share with God's people who are in need' (Romans ch 12 v 13).

July 1999

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version

A Brief Practical Guide for Parents

First a plea to those who read this section.

DO NOT avoid learning about how to help young people in need by saying it is unlikely to happen to me / my children / somebody I know. Society has almost reached the stage of normalising drug taking behaviour in young adults and therefore certainly ALL teenagers, however sheltered, will be exposed to drug taking in its various forms. Some will succumb to more than just experimentation and unfortunately become addicted.

The following is a very brief guide on how to identify and assess problems and what you might do to help. There are no ready made solutions for what can appear overwhelming problems but neither should helping individuals with drug and alcohol problems be left completely to the realm of specialists. We all should be able to learn some simple Do's and Don'ts and then to put them into practice. Some of the principles outlined below are merely common sense and should underpin all our dealings with young people.

DO look out for the signs of continued drug misuse:-

- sudden and persisting changes of mood
- unusual irritability or aggression
- loss of appetite
- loss of interest in hobbies / sports / work or friends

- increased evidence of telling lies or furtive behaviour
- unexplained loss of money or belongings from the home
- unusual bouts of drowsiness / sleeping

DO check the facts.

DON'T jump to conclusions.

DO take your time to assess the situation.

DO stay calm when the truth comes out.

DO TALK however reluctant you may be or difficult the situation.

Parents are the most important influence in a child's' life. They do hear what you say and notice what you do. But they also care a lot about what their friends and peer group think and that is the great dilemma for young people.

Above all, DO LISTEN.

Your child needs you to try and understand how things look from their point of view. You won't necessarily agree and it may be difficult to discuss certain subjects but try to talk about their BIG issues not yours. Drugs and alcohol will certainly be one and may be their real concern as well as yours.

DO take a young person seriously.

DO take time to get to know their views, feelings and friends,

but give them space.

DON'T bully, lecture, preach or scare your children about drugs. This will not work.

DO let them know your feelings about drugs. Your child is more likely to respect them if given in a sensitive and straightforward manner.

DO set an example with regard to alcohol and tobacco especially.

DO get them to think how they can refuse drugs or get help / advice.

DO work with them and not against them.

Try to instil a sense of personal responsibility when help or support is required. For example drugs and alcohol services however well intentioned can not be forced on anyone. In other words DON'T do everything in trying to help someone but rather try to help them to help themselves.

If a "big problem" emerges DON'T panic, stay calm.

DO find out the facts about the drug taking and the type of drug(s) in question. Get information from any / all sources. See end of article for starting places for information.

DON'T be devious or break confidence as your relationship with the young person may be the most important factor in preventing deterioration and aiding recovery.

DON'T assume complete abstinence from drug taking has to be the first or only goal. Dealing with addiction may take some time. Small steps in the right direction are more likely and achievable for a drug misuser than the huge gains that are often expected immediately by friends and family.

DO encourage these small steps and

DO praise achievements however slight these might be initially.
DO show real tolerance to continuing difficult and challenging behaviour. Surely we have a wonderful example in the Lord Jesus. Our foundations may be shaken but a testing of our faith can bring rewards in the long run. No one who has personal experience of drug misuse will readily dismiss the rich blessings of an "ordinary" life and ever forget to be thankful for the love that is shown to us by God through his Son.

We should never forsake a drug misuser by saying that there is no hope of a change. But occasionally we have to withdraw to a safe distance if there is real danger to ourselves or it is deemed to be in the best interests of that person. Take advice. Unfortunately those who misuse drugs have to go all the way down into the gutter before they can pick themselves up again. Remember the prodigal son!

DON'T EVER take on drug dealers / pushers. Leave this to the Drug Squad.

DO take advice from the professionals i.e. Drug Agencies,

Addiction Units, Counselling Services (and yes, this might / should include The Care Group). There are many sources of help, some statutory, some voluntary; KEEP asking especially if you are unsure what to do next or where to go for help. (See end of article for typical agencies available).

DON'T EVER let pride or denial prevent or delay help being accessed.

DO take heart that not all young people who experience drug taking become the stereotypical "TV drug-addict" on a destructive, downward spiral.

Finally DO pray. Positive outcomes are not in the hands of just those that care for, support and treat drug misusers. The saying may be familiar but it is definitely true.... At times it may be hard to pray but that is when we should pray the hardest. And as somebody who sees the increasing misery that drug taking brings to so many young lives then I remind readers that it makes me pray for the kingdom to come when there shall be no more suffering and pain.

Jonathan Adams

Jonathan is a GP specialising in drug and alcohol addiction in a City Centre Practice.

Where to get help:-

National:-

The National Drugs Helpline Tel. 0800 77 66 00 (24hrs, every day)

Gives FREE advice about drugs, including advice on how to talk to your children about drugs, confidential counselling or information on any aspect of drug taking. It can tell you about local services in your area and how to be referred onto specialist services such as clinics and rehabilitation programmes.

Adfam National

Tel. 0171 928 8900 (10-5pm ,Mon-Fri)

The national helpline for friends and families of drug users. Provides confidential support and information to anyone who is worried about someone close to them using drugs.

Health Education Authority

Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2HW

Produces a range of excellent publications for use by anyone concerned with their own drug problems or someone else's. Examples:-

A Parent's Guide To Drugs and Alcohol Many parents and carers worry about their children becoming involved with drugs and alcohol but feel they don't know enough about the subject to talk to their children. This booklet provides basic facts about

the range of illegal drugs; guidance on talking about drugs with their children; advice and sources of help for those worried that their children might be using drugs.

Advice about Alcohol for Young People / Parents A discussion guide and information booklet.

Drinking and Me (Teacher's Guide) 8 lesson guide for teachers designed to encourage young people to make appropriate choices about their drinking and behaviour. Key stage 2 and 3. Also useful for youth club workers.

Drugs: The Facts Talking to 11-14 year olds about drugs can be difficult, but this leaflet gets the message across in a clear accessible way that young people will understand.

The Score:Facts about drugs Designed for young people aged between 14-16, this leaflet has been carefully targeted to reach this notoriously hard-to-please age range!

D-Mag A magazine which provides information about drugs for 16-25 year olds

The Care Group has a limited supply of these publications.

Local places to seek help

Depending on the area you live in there will be a specialised addiction clinic (run usually by health agencies), a detoxification

/ rehabilitation unit (which may be run by health, social and voluntary services in partnership), counselling services, voluntary drug agencies, self help groups such as alcoholics anonymous or narcotics anonymous. Some will be specifically geared for young people perhaps. Your local GP may have some experience in dealing with drug misuse and its associated problems. Ask and look for local addresses and telephone numbers. Remember to give the Care Group consideration. Above all don't give up if one agency doesn't seem to suit. Try another and as circumstances change don't be afraid to go back.

Jonathan Adams

THE PERILS OF DRUG ABUSE

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I suppose as someone in his early twenties, discontented and disillusioned with life, feeling a sense of self-inadequacy and pointlessness to life, I was prime material to become involved in the 'drug scene'¹ of the seventies. Most of my contemporaries (on the drug scene, that is) shared this mentality; because there was no point in life and because of its unpleasantness, we wanted no part in it, so "let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die", and that's the end of it. Drug addicts and 'junkies' would become known as 'drop-outs' from society, which indeed we were.

My first experience of taking drugs was with cannabis, which one smoked, ate or made into cakes. It acted upon the central nervous system, making one laugh and also making one very lazy; it distorted vision, physically and mentally.

Invariably where one obtained cannabis there were also other drugs to be found, and I progressed very quickly from cannabis

to what was described as a 'complementary' drug to cannabis LSD. LSD is a very powerful hallucinogenic. It was said that, once you had experimented with it, you would never be the same again - a drug that would irrevocably alter your way of thinking. I had one particular, very frightening experience on it, after which I never took it again.

Barbiturates were very commonly used drugs too and I soon began to take them also. They had the effect of making one feel very drunk, often aggressive and thoroughly unpleasant. Barbiturate was the first drug, which I injected, causing many abscesses and thromboses. I lost a number of friends who died either from barbiturate poisoning or through vomiting whilst asleep (asphyxiation).

To counteract the drowsiness caused by the barbiturate, one would also take amphetamines ('speed'), a stimulant that would enable one to stay awake for great lengths of time. Amphetamines induced a feeling of euphoria, making one very talkative. I have seen many people mentally destroyed through prolonged use of amphetamines - reduced to a paranoid, gibbering wreck of a person. This drug was very popular, however, and, although I used amphetamines a lot, I was

fortunate in that I incurred no lasting side effects or recrudescant flashbacks.

I knew that one day I would come into contact with heroin and cocaine. I did, and I began to dabble with that too; not every day, but just occasionally, because the black market for heroin had been rendered virtually non-existent by the policy which Drug clinics had adopted. It went something like this: anyone with a drug problem would go to one of these clinics and, as long as they were prepared to disclose where they were getting their drugs from, the clinic would legally take over supplying those drugs, whilst making sure (via the police) that that particular pusher was caught. Effectively that killed the black market.

One does not become addicted to heroin overnight - that is a fallacy. It takes about three weeks of regular usage to become physically addicted. Psychological addiction, however, can set in very quickly and, in my case, once tried, it was almost inevitable that I would end up hopelessly addicted. Because of the scarcity of heroin in those days, I decided that I would break into a chemist's shop and get it for myself. (Chemists in those days stocked vast quantities of heroin, morphine, cocaine and all the commonly used drugs of the time.) The amount of heroin,

morphine and cocaine I took would last me six weeks using, that is, quite a lot each day.

Having four or five injections a day, I still regarded myself as a drug dilettante, not a drug addict with a problem out of control. Drug problem? I hadn't a drug problem - I had plenty! Such was my attitude. I recall waking up the morning after the stuff had run out and thinking to myself, "I'll get some more later" but as the day wore on I began to experience stomach pains, sweats, running nose, running eyes and diarrhoea; my mouth became dry; I felt hot and cold at the same time. My sense of smell became more acute and I became aware of a sickly smell coming from myself. My whole body became as taut as a bowstring, nerves ready to snap. One 'fix', and all that disappeared.

I realised then that I had a 'habit'.. Things would now become serious. I was no longer using the drug; the drug was using me. I had lost control; the drugs had gained it. Totally at their mercy, I would be at their beck and call night and day.

Five chemists later, the drugs would see me sent to prison for eighteen months. Coming out from that I would continue breaking into chemist's, and receive a four year sentence. After

the four years, I would receive a three year sentence, then another three years - all for stealing from chemist's.

I won't go into the gory details of what using a needle did to my body, nor the heartache and suffering I caused to those who loved me (particularly my family). Suffice it to say that it was quite horrendous - and, in retrospect, I am ashamed.

After prolonged use of the drugs, they begin to lose their efficacy and one finds that the walls of the opiate-woven cocoon begin to fail apart. This drug-induced refuge is no longer there, and one is ineluctably faced with that from which one has been seeking to hide - reality and self. Most, if not all, surviving addicts sooner or later reach this climacteric point in their life and, when they do, two things may happen:

- (1) they come off drugs completely or
- (2) they commit suicide.

When I reached this point I certainly contemplated the latter. A life without the escapism that drugs afforded was something I could not come to terms with; for me it didn't bear thinking about. Death would be preferable.

In this suicidal, resigned, morose state of mind, I happened (does anything just 'happen' to those whom God calls?) to meet someone with whom I fell in love. This particular person, though not a Christian herself, would be encouraged to go to Christadelphian meetings by a friend of hers and, just to please my girl friend, I would go along too. Now I didn't know anything about the Bible at all - I had never read any of it. I was going to the Bible talks to please her and for no other reason. I would listen to the talks out of politeness if nothing else, but I didn't really grasp much of what was said. Having said that, the little I did grasp made a lot of sense and, although I couldn't put my finger on it at the time, I felt that there was something in what was being said. I found myself beginning to look forward to the Sunday evening talks.

I think I had been going to these talks for about three months, and also reading the Bible for myself, when I decided one evening, while alone in the flat, to really try to understand the Bible teaching regarding the crucifixion. It was an evening which would change my whole life.

I can only describe what happened that evening as a 'Damascus road' experience, and I remember trembling and shaking with

the awesome revelation which God gave me through His Word. Words are insufficient to describe the experience, but it was something which profoundly affected me - something from which I would never be able to walk away. I had found something that would eventually become so precious to me that I would be able to count everything else in life as 'dung' compared with it. My need for drugs, though still a bit of a problem at first, would, as the value of God's gospel increased in my life and as my understanding of God's love grew, become swallowed up and disappear in my response of love to the love of God.

Some people might say that, because I had reached such a low point in my life, I was ready to grasp at anything that offered a way out. Such reasoning is common to those who do not believe, but the truth of the matter is that, before one is able to recognise one's need of God, one has to be brought to one's knees, or broken. As Jesus says, "He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Matth ch 21 c 44). Sometimes there is no other way. Such was true in my case.

Something which happened to me in my days on the drug scene has remained in my mind since I became a Christian. I had taken

a large overdose of barbiturates which had left me in a coma for four days, and my heart stopped twice. I was in the Intensive Care Unit for almost two weeks and, when I was discharged into the custody of the West Midlands Drug Squad, the Officer in Charge said to me, "Someone up there is watching over you - you should be dead".

Before I had begun to seek Him, He was very close by.
How much closer when we do seek Him - **"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"**.
(Jer ch 29 v 13)

Michael Woodcock

DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

(This article takes the form of a question and answer dialogue)

*We don't have these kinds of problem in our community do we?
Aren't they problems of the inner cities?*

Yes, we do. Members of the Care Group have been asked to help with both of these problems.

Surely we shouldn't be talking about such problems.

Yes we should, because only by talking about them can we find ways of helping those who have these problems.

How does someone with such a problem get help from within our community, and is it confidential?

Some Care Group members have first-hand experience and will respect the confidence entrusted to them. They know that you are not the only one with the problem.

It might be helpful to know something of your experience. Can you tell us the background to the way you became addicted?

My very early years were happy indeed but, at the age of maybe seven I started to tell myself that I was no good. I started to get into trouble at school. As I stood outside the headmaster's office, I told myself that I was no good. I was the class clown and didn't mix very well. The few friends I had were very silly, and I was probably the silliest. If a window had been broken, there was a good chance that I had done it.

Looking back, I can see the 'over-the-topness' clearly. It is one of the big characteristics of an addictive personality. I would always out-dare anybody else, rip a plank off a fence, break a light on a lamppost, fire air rifles at people (at a distance) or at pigeons in the centre of the town. I was arrested at the age of twelve. I smashed up a greenhouse for no reason except it was fun. I made petrol bombs and fireworks out of weed killer and sugar.

I wanted to be like Peter Pan and never grow up, and yet Captain Hook, the other side of me, was never far away, ready to cause trouble.

And there in one paragraph is the recipe for an addictive personality - a drug addict, an alcoholic, a gambler, etc - they do not grow up emotionally. The craving of an addict is a symptom of somebody who may be twenty-five acting like a twelve-year-old. At the age of thirteen I got drunk - very drunk - and made a fool of myself stealing some sherry from my host, for which I was found out - and I felt awful.

I learned ways of not feeling hurt by emotionally distancing myself from those closest to me. That meant that, for a while, things felt better, but emotionally I was not growing up. I did not do well at school. At fourteen I started to experience extreme mood swings, but at fifteen I was baptised. For a while the euphoria of 'conversion' carried me. I was, of course, just as 'over the top' in a good way - for a while.

My immaturity showed through quite quickly and at eighteen I suffered a year of horrible clinical depression. Strangely enough I did not drink at that time, but did take up smoking

cigarettes. Another major characteristic of addictive people is self-centredness. What caused my depression was watching home movies of myself as a kid, and wishing I was a kid again. Self-centredness is great fun for a short while, but it demands a high price in return. That price for me was poor sleep, bad appetite, body odour and a state of anxiety so bad that my face used to hurt with the tension, and my speech was so fast I could hardly be understood. Although I read quite a few books on depression, only one seemed to have been much help. Eventually I worked out the cause of the depression and I stopped watching the films. But my recovery was slow.

I met my fiancée-to-be soon after, and I went to college. I was also working in my father's chemist's, and I failed abysmally. Of course, working with pharmaceutical drugs was not a good idea. I experimented in a small way with drugs, abusing Ephedrine, which wakes you up and makes you feel very alert, but also gives you vile headaches and stops you sleeping, leaving you feeling awful afterwards.

At first my relationship with my fiancée was very good, but then we started fooling around, and eventually sleeping together. The

guilt of this double life started me on binge drinking - the drinking was a symptom of my guilt.

I was thrown out of my Dad's shop for a serious betrayal of trust and serious drug charge. I ended up in a Crown Court and narrowly missed going to prison. I got a new job, but my fiancée had had enough and did the best thing possible (looking back) - she left me and went out with my foreman. It did not do a lot for my self-confidence, but I can't blame her, since I had a second rate job and a criminal record. I left my second rate job (in a warehouse) to get away from her boy friend, my foreman.

From 1980 to 1983 I started to really go downhill, helped by another major characteristic of addictive people - an inferiority complex. I kept telling myself that I was no good, like I used to do. I left the meeting. I drank and drank. I hated my fiancée; I hated myself.

In 1981 I fell in love with another girl, but by this time my addiction to alcohol was getting a serious hold on me. The 'cracks' started opening up.. My personality deteriorated fast. I was not nice to be with, so she finished with me.

At the same time I was asked back to my Dad's chemist's - not a good move. From 1983 to February 1986 I womanised as much as I could, got drunk a lot and took plenty of drugs (from the shop). I learned that anti-sickness tablets meant I could take more drugs and drinks without 'throwing up'.

By this time I wanted to destroy myself, and at first it was fun. I stole thousands of pounds from the shop and lied all the time, but I was able to 'justify' my theft. I thought to myself, "Well, the shop can afford it and, anyway, I'm not paid very well, and I'll keep it down to so much". Of course, eventually I could make black white, and 'so much' could be any amount.

Towards the end of 1984 my body started to complain loudly. I was becoming ill a lot. I then lived with my ex-fiancée, who had left her husband. I was taking Diconal (like heroin) as well as drinking and smoking a lot of cannabis. Then for about three months I stopped all drugs and drink and I felt better physically and mentally. But because the reasons for taking drugs had not been sorted out, I went back to them in March 1985.

The effect of abuse is cumulative; the longer you abuse a substance, the more damage you do to yourself, the more

physically addicted you become and therefore the worse you feel when you come off. Withdrawal from drugs as shown in films tends to be exaggerated, but withdrawal from alcohol is about the worst in the real world, along with barbiturates. The number of people who die from drugs is relatively small (about 250 per year), but alcohol kills many more each year, because the number of people who drink is much larger than the number of people who take hard drugs. But the Press would have you believe otherwise.

From March 1985 things get a bit hazy. What I do remember is the amount of drugs I was taking got frightening and I was in a very bad way.

Another eleven months rolled (staggered!) by and I was about ready to break. I went down to Brixton with a mate of mine to buy some cannabis (I spent all my money on the drug). I'm not sure why I got lost, but I did and I ended up collapsing with hypothermia and being taken to an emergency place for drug addicts. I was told that I would be dead within a few months if I did not stop. I was scared and surrendered to the police, hoping to get help, or even a lift home. They took the cannabis off me, charged me (which I don't remember) and basically told me to

drop dead (which I certainly do remember - I exploded with anger). It seemed like my last chance of getting home had gone. The weather was bitterly cold and there was a very real possibility that I would die of the cold. There was nothing for it but to try to talk my way back home. I walked back to Euston Station and persuaded a taxi driver to take me home with a promise of £150 for the 90-mile journey!

After this I lost my job and was arrested twice on drugs-related charges. My house was searched by the Drug Squad and they found large amounts of Codeine, tranquillisers and drink. As a result I came off all drugs, which was very hard, but substituted the drink for the drugs, which made me feel OK again.

A few weeks later, after a sharp pain and blood tests, I was taken into a medical hospital to be dried out. I was told it would be slow suicide to drink or take drugs. I thought I was free of all drugs and alcohol. After four days of being sober I discharged myself, against the advice of the doctors.

For three weeks after giving up, I got worse and worse. I was hallucinating, 'seeing things' and 'hearing voices'.. As time went on, I became so scared of everything that I admitted myself to

a mental hospital for five weeks, where at first I got even worse. After being released I was 'stabilised', but I was still very ill and over the next few months I gradually got worse still.

I had lost any faith I had had in God, apart from the odd day or week when I would 'go religious' for a short while. I made about half-a-dozen half-hearted attempts at killing myself, until I really tried to kill myself with a razor blade. I lost a lot of blood and was nearly brain-damaged. I was stitched up and, the following day, sent to a mental hospital. I had been 'sectioned' (which meant that I could not leave) for five weeks. I was put on big doses of major tranquillisers and sleeping capsules. When I eventually got out, my problems were worse not better.

Christmas came and went and I was still in hell and still suffering from hallucinations.

After such terrible experiences, how did you recover?

Several things helped my recovery:

- (1) I stopped all tranquillisers
- (2) I did some work - ill as I was
- (3) I practised the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous

In practice most people have to hit rock bottom before they really want to be cured. That often means being ill with addiction so that you have lost your job, or been in a medical hospital or psychiatric unit. If a person is to be helped, they themselves have got to want it badly. So the best chance of helping somebody is when they are at their rock-bottom but, no matter how bad they are, there is no guarantee that they will want to be helped even then.

So, how did I give up this terminal, self-centred illness?

This may sound stupid, but addiction is so insidious that it can take you months or years to really believe that you have a problem. In my case it became an intellectual fact three months before it became an emotional fact.

Are you OK now? Presumably you can drink in moderation?

I expect quite a few people fail because they con themselves. They say to themselves things like, "If I stay sober for one year, I will have earned a night out drinking - surely one night a year won't hurt", or "I'll smoke dope at weekends only". If you have reservations like that, you will fail and get worse and worse

because, however sincerely you may believe it will be 'once a year' or 'weekends only', this is rubbish. Even if you last a year (which I doubt), the 'one night' will become two nights, and three, and four, and soon you will be as bad as you ever were. Indeed you will be worse, with more guilt and more feelings of doom.

So it is absolutely crucial to let go of your old way of life completely. That means getting rid of those friends who tempt you - your old drinking partners, your druggie friends.

BUT there is no point in doing that unless the vacuum left is filled with something better.

Part of the 'something better' is getting a job, be it a voluntary job like weeding people's gardens or a job in a factory. Having some kind of job and giving of your best to that job is very therapeutic and good for stopping you feeling sorry for yourself.

What also helps to fill that vacuum is a good diet. Often in your addictive days you live on junk food all the time or hardly eat at all. Now I enjoy plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and that certainly does help me. It does not mean that I have become

some kind of 'food freak'. They have a motto in Alcoholics Anonymous: 'Easy does it'. It is good advice.

What else helps?

Doing other people good turns helps.

Keeping fit, i.e. finding some kind of exercise you enjoy. I like cycling to work, going to the gym and running, but not all the time - it can become boring. If I've had a tough day I use the running as an escape, and it does help.

Getting plenty of sleep and drinking plenty of liquids (non-alcoholic, of course!) also helps.

But there is an over-riding problem: addictive people are poorly disciplined and that is why they must go a day at a time.

For example, I write a daily list (sometimes) which might say:

- (1) Say sorry to Bill (no preconditions)
- (2) I will be at work on time
- (3) I will forgive my elder brother
- (4) I will face that problem that scares me (I will not be afraid)

- (5) I will read a chapter of a book that makes me think - not trash
- (6) I will give myself plenty of time to get to work

It may be that I will only achieve 1, 2 and 3 - and that's a lot. Just for today I will have a programme, even though I may not follow it exactly. In this way, I will save myself from two bug-bears: hurry and indecision.

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings have helped me but, as I am the only Christadelphian in Rugby who goes to AA, there are Christadelphian subjects I cannot talk about easily. So would it be a good idea to have a Christadelphian equivalent of Alcoholics Anonymous? If anybody is serious about doing this, please let me know.

'Confession is good for the soul.' It certainly is. Telling your innermost secrets to somebody you don't know is a good thing when you know it won't go any further. 'Confess your faults one to another' is good scriptural advice.

It might interest you to know that the Samaritans organisation was formed because a girl killed herself after having her first

period. She thought she had some terminal illness. "How tragic", thought the founder of the Samaritans, "If only there was somebody she could have talked to in confidence, her life could have been saved".

The Christadelphian Care Group was also formed out of a need to talk in confidence to somebody who will understand and who may have 'been there' and knows what your problem is like.

Is there anything in the Bible which has helped you?

Yes. The Sermon on the Mount is very helpful. For example, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own". (Matth ch 6 v 34)

Alcoholics Anonymous have a similar approach in their phrase, "Just for today".

So "Just for today I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out. If anybody finds out, it won't count".

"Just for today, I will not criticise nor try to improve or regulate anybody except myself."

"Just for today, I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everyone to my own desires. I will take my 'luck', and fit myself to it."

Jesus tells us to love our enemies (Matth ch 5 v 44). He does not ask us to like our enemies, but to love them. The Greek word for love used here is 'agape', and the same word is used in John ch 3 v 16), "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".. I believe this agape love is a love that has nothing to do with emotion - it is love in action. God so loved the world that He did something - **He gave His only Son**. It is not realistic to like everyone. Some people at a gut level rile you. But it is realistic to do something for such a person.

Now it is said that grudges kill more alcoholics and drug addicts than anything else. I spent years feeding grudges and enjoying it. What terrible damage it did. So doing something good for an 'enemy' is not done because of any good qualities he or she may have, not because they deserve it; it is done to rid yourself of the feeling of bearing a grudge. For it to be workable, it must be unconditional as far as the other person is concerned.

For example, when someone upsets me it is ultimately irrelevant who is right or wrong but, when it happens, I cannot afford to hold a grudge; I have to act quickly. There are some situations where you can avoid trouble. Some people are argumentative by nature and if such a person ridicules one of your pet hobby-horses, you want to argue. It takes courage, not cowardice, to back off. One of the wonderful spin-offs of the agape love is that, if you are practising it, you cannot help but listen to the other person; whereas when people argue, almost instantly they don't hear each other. Ridding yourself of grudges must be number one always - it works wonders.

Another commandment of Jesus is, "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matth ch 5 v 48). The word 'perfect' does not mean sinless, it means 'mature' or 'grown up'. No-one is sinless except Christ. Perfectionism is another trait of addictive people, but what they need is maturity.

But surely, as a baptised follower of the Lord Jesus, you're doomed because you deliberately turned your back on God? Isn't it too late?

I think a fitting reply to this question is found in the story of the Prodigal Son - a man who must have suffered great degradation in his life, probably an alcoholic and a womaniser. Nevertheless, he was still his father's son. Did the father condemn him when he returned truly sorry for what he had done? No, he forgave him unreservedly. The Prodigal Son's father says it best, "This brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. (Luke ch 15 v 32)

Some of us have to learn to appreciate the forgiveness of God the hard way by leaving the meeting, and then realising what fools we have been. I'm not, of course, promoting the idea of being a prodigal son (or daughter) as a good thing in itself, BUT COMING BACK HAS BEEN GREAT.

POSTSCRIPT

I have been clean of drugs and been sober for eight years now. I feel I have grown up quite a bit. Addiction is both a physical and a spiritual disease. If I touch alcohol, be it a very small amount,

I will crave instantly and strongly. My disease has been arrested not cured.

Some addicts, to whatever substance, have thought they would be OK to take whatever they are addicted to in moderation -and have ended up in hospital, or dead. I know of an alcoholic who stopped drinking for about twenty-five years. When he retired he thought he would be OK, but within four years he was dead from drink.

I can never drink or take drugs again.

The spiritual approach I've described also helped me to give up smoking shortly after the drink. Now, fourteen years on, I am far more settled and at ease. I still have the odd bad day but, generally, life is good.

Peter Baylis