



ANTI-ADDICTION DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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Black youth are “out in an ocean surrounded by the sharks of drugs (and) alcohol, ...and we’ve been sitting on the beach sipping from our fountains of ‘just say no’,... It’s easier for children to find drugs than it is for them to find hugs.”

--Jocelyn Elders, Former
United States Surgeon
General (Associated Press,
1994)

I. Introduction

Addictions are often both physical and psychological compulsions to engage in some specific activity, despite harmful consequences to one’s individual health, spirituality, mental state or social life. The disorder of drug addiction is a historical and present reality, and one’s individual level of emotional, social, mental and/or physical addiction varies with the substance, the frequency of drug usage, the means of consumption, the intensity of pleasure or euphoria, and the individual's genetic and psychological susceptibility.

The devastation drug addiction spawns has left no culture exempt, and among racial and ethnic minority populations substance abuse has often been an escape and/or coping mechanism for confronting the demands of social pressure, stress, trauma, and oppression. For example, “a person who is abused or traumatized may develop dysfunctional defensive strategies or behaviors designed to ward off emotional and psychological pain.”¹

Anti-addiction is a journey of evolution and self-empowerment that eliminates pain in the brain through confessions. An anti-addiction way of life is a personal choice to recognize an awesome power and divine intelligence within that is accessible and available wherever you are, and to use this power and intelligence to stand up for yourself, use your life experiences to help others, give up bad habits, negative thinking and people. It is a path that requires that you walk away from everything you now know to get to a place in your life where you should be as a child of God.

Drug recovery requires a disciplined mind and body, confession, tearing away from addictive appetites, belittling burdens and frivolous fears, and that one shakes him or herself loose from making excuses for the things you have and have not done. Being free from addiction can be a victorious battle over powers and principalities of self-hatred, trauma, and fear, and put one on the road towards healthiness, abundant joy, and being at total peace with yourself and your life. God gives everyone the spiritual power to reclaim their L.I.F.E (Love, Inspiration, Faith, Empowerment) from the sin of addiction.

II. A Historical Lesson

The structural and systemic inequalities experienced by African Americans in American society present a fearsome challenge and create a complexity of social and personal issues. The individual qualities and social skills to cope with these challenges and issues cannot be taught in a classroom or the industrial prison complex. In neighborhoods all over America lives are being made wretched by involvement in and exposure to the use of illegal drugs. Since the 1970s, by many reports there has been an absence of a sense of community in African American communities and an alienation of residents regarding issues of poverty and mutual responsibility. After the departure of the middle-class to the suburbs, many African Americans within inner-cities were left poor, isolated and disfranchised. During the 1980s, family structures weakened more, and the number of African American children living in households headed by a single female parent increased, and the drug culture became a dominant way of life in urban neighborhoods. Crack cocaine became the drug of choice, and the underground subculture and economy it spawned destroyed almost all the remnants of social order within African American communities.

As a result, the nature of the violence in these communities became more lethal. The consequences of drug addiction provided media never-ending stories about killings among drug dealers, murders of innocent children and adults via gang violence, babies addicted to crack, and grandmothers left to rear children because their fathers were incarcerated and their mothers were crack addicts.

As a society, we have failed to listen to the narrative of the most needy and vulnerable in our communities, ignored the power and spirit evoked by testimonies by the “other,” and silenced the drug-related testimonies of the transcendent possibilities of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

In my generation, experimenting with drugs was seen as natural by many and served as an ideal escape from the thick reality of being Black in America. As a member of generation “X,” it was hard to get a clear picture of what defines acceptable public discussion of illicit drugs, so drugs were often mystified. The mystification of drugs minimized the imminent threat of drug usage, restricted the differing conditions of threat and opportunity, and silenced straight talk and open debate about the prevalence of addiction and use of drugs in our homes, churches, and society. The lack of communication about illegal drugs made them intriguing to youth, a symbol of status and wealth within the inner-city, and a glorified self-induced cure for all your problems. Concomitantly, drugs were viewed as a social commodity for “hip and cool” people, forged alliances between blacks and whites, poor and rich, and opened channels of mutual support for people to share and communicate the pain they perceived and felt about their life. Hence, becoming addicted to drugs wasn’t the aspiration, it was just a way of having fun, a temporary escape, and a means of self-help to correct and adjust to changing realities and shifting urgencies. In order to comprehend the phenomenon of drug use and addiction, we must get a clear understanding of what makes bad choices look good, what keeps a drug mentality operative once established, as well as obtain open testimonies concerning the spirit and committed will of people who desire to be liberated from their drug addiction. Thus, we must ask those confronting their issues of dependence, “What advantage did you get from that of which you are now ashamed?”

III. Stories and Illustrations

When crack cocaine gained national media attention around 1985, it created a reporting frenzy. Very few stories reported the degrading and dangerous sexual activities and violence that many women experience being addicted to crack cocaine. Their voices have often been silenced because most of their testimonies are depressing, unsettling, and shameful to admit. These are some confessions of women who are addicted to drugs that you may hear on an Anti-Addiction Sunday:

- “Hustling is how I get by. What that means is that I get up at noon, boost (shoplift) something at the OMNI (shopping mall) on my way to cop some drugs. I’ll sell half the drugs for profit, and sell the watch or perfume that I boosted to someone on the street. Then some car date will wave me down an’ I’ll give him a quick blow and if he’s careless I’ll empty his pockets. Later in the day I might help in a breakin’-in, deliver some coke for a Montana (a Cuban drug dealer)... and at night I’ll be back on the stroll.”²
- “I once killed a man over crack. He was a dealer, he wanted too much for it, and he made me mad.”³
- “One time I saw a girl raped beside me but I couldn’t do nothing because I was all high and tripping you know, they tied her down to a bed and one got in front of her and the other got in back of her, and she was hollering and screaming you know, and while he was doing it to her he was beating her you know, because she was trying to steal one of the guy’s drugs.”⁴

- “I been in the streets so long that when a guy talks to me I can get a feeling from the way that he talks to me whether he is gonna cause me a problem or not and with this feeling I won’t go.”⁵

You may also hear testimonies from women who have entered treatment and want to share their stories to make a difference. One woman who entered a residential treatment facility stated that she got into freebasing coke and using crack. She got to a point to where she was prostituting and stealing all night. She stated that she earning up to \$150 a day and sometimes a \$1000 dollars a weekend working the streets after work. Then, she stated she would come to work late, fight with her co-workers, and got mad at her boss because he interfered with her cocaine use. So, she quit showing up to work. She eventually got arrested for carrying a half a gram of cocaine. While in jail, she stated that she made “so many deals with God about how I’d change and do better if I could just walk away this one time.”⁶ She stated God must have known she was lying because she ended up doing sixty days in jail. She ended up losing everything she had and started doing crack cocaine instead of freebasing cocaine. So, she began to steal---“I was stealing from the johns, I was stealing from the shopping malls, from the supermarkets, I was breaking into cars, I was carrying crack for this guy I knew, I was doing cons (confidence games) on tourists, I was picking pockets and stealing luggage at the airport.”⁷ She finally ended up selling her body and performing sexual acts for \$5 and \$10 dollars. She stated at that time in her life you would think that she would do something about it, but she didn’t. She then tells a story of an incident that made her enter drug treatment;

I tried to gets this guys wallet...we were in this room on 55th street. He caught me, and we got into a fight. He started to beat me, and I pulled a knife, but he got it from me. He hit me so hard that he broke my jaw and practically knocked me out. Then he takes this bottle off the floor and breaks the top off it. I still had no clothes on, and he breaks off the end and rams it into my vagina, he starts cursing me—“filthy whore” —and he (was) twisting it around, tearing me up.⁸

These testimonies and confessions are too common among women who are addicted to drugs. Both society and churches must be willing to listen and learn from individuals battling addiction in their midst, provide a “safe place” for discourse; and possess empathy, compassion, as well as encourage an ethical responsibility to help the most needy and vulnerable people in our communities that are suffering because they cannot cope with the complexity of issues in their lives and the shame that being at the bottom of the social order creates.

In the words of a male crack dealer:

The crack house is a carnival of vice. It is one hell of a nasty place... it is...where anything goes--any drug, any kick, any perversion, any trip, even to heaven or hell---if you have the “hard white” or hard dollars to buy. It is that mystic place beyond the edge of the world where dreams are really nightmares and where nightmares are always real. And more, it

is home—home to the wretched, the depraved, and the perverted.⁹

IV. One Solution to Lessen Addiction – Afrocentric Socialization

According to social psychologists, those who learn from others that drug addiction is pleasurable are often the most likely to use drugs.¹⁰ So, it stands to reason that many drug users come out of homes and environments of drug use and abuse.¹¹ Along with coming out of bad environments, we can also readily name the other lists of likely precursors to drug addiction by African Americans. Even though there may be disagreement about some of the precursors on the named list, we all can produce lists. However, for too long, that has been the extent of the action by too large a sector of the African American faith community—just naming what’s on the list of things that lead to addiction. We keep preaching that no father at home greatly leads to boys becoming addicts. We keep preaching that education is the key to a non-drug addicted life while in the same breath lamenting that high schools have become gun and drug battle grounds. We keep preaching that the white man is still arresting black men in numbers that are unjust. However, what addicts need are not just sermons, they need processes that lead to sobriety. **They need churches that are committed to being Anti-Addiction churches through their church ministries and their budgets.** Ask almost any pastor in the inner-city or a rural town, if there is a major addiction problem in their community? “Yes,” they will say without hesitation. But then ask, how many ministries in your church are purposely designed to stop addictive behaviors? Likely, the answer by most pastors will be almost none or none.

But how can that be in 2010? If a black man is in the White House then surely churches can become Anti-Addiction houses. But how? There is no one panacea that will work in every city or every church, but there is one process that offers hope and is doable if pastors and the church will commit to it. William Oliver of the University of Delaware calls it Afrocentric Socialization. Oliver writes about how “Euroamerican ideology” through schools, religion and mass media has glorified whiteness and demonized or belittled blackness. He asserts that blacks need an Afrocentric ideology that will combat this. He says:

The failure of blacks to develop an Afrocentric cultural ideology is a major source of psychological, social, political, and economic dysfunction among black Americans. Afrocentricity as defined by Asante is the centering of one’s analysis and perceptions from the groundedness of the African person. Black self-hatred has been a major factor that has historically contributed to the lack of unity among blacks as well as a pervasive low evaluation of blacks by blacks. Hence, the failure of blacks to develop an Afrocentric cultural ideology has prevented blacks from developing the sort of collective philosophy, definitions, cultural traditions, and institutions that other American racial and ethnic groups have established in order to facilitate their survival and progress in American society.¹² An Afrocentric cultural ideology would encourage black Americans to transcend cultural crisis and confusion by reclaiming

traditional African values that emphasize “mankind’s oneness with nature,” “spirituality,” and “collectivism.”¹³

Oliver further offers that an Afrocentric ideology would acknowledge how pervasive racism still is and suggest that African Americans define themselves via their historic homeland as do people of all other races.¹⁴ He then calls for what some churches have begun, which is a rite of passage program. He suggests especially targeting young boys for the program. Their socialization would include the church working with families to help them instill Afrocentric values such as spirituality and collective concern for one’s community. Next he suggests that the curriculum for the program use the principles of the Nguzo Saba. The principles are unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.¹⁵

While such a program is keenly needed for youth before they are buried for life by addiction, such a rite of passage program for adults who are working to overcome addiction is also gravely needed. In many respects, working with African American adult addicts may in fact require unteaching Euroamerican socialization and replacing it with Afrocentric socialization more than it would socializing youth who have not yet been swallowed by addiction.

Using a slightly revised version of the Nguzo Saba values, a church program for African American adults seeking to overcome addiction would include the following elements at a minimum, aided by the help of trained counselors and social welfare professionals:

a. Faith Enhancement – An Anti-Addiction program led by any faith community must be grounded in faith: Faith that people can change; Faith that addiction does not have the last word; Faith that people are worth saving; and Faith that asserts that the community, working with the addict and aided by God, can turn things around. Faith is a necessary component for doing long-term work with those who are controlled by addiction. Many addicts may stop and start many times. However, faith as a grounding principle of an Anti-Addiction Rites of Passage Program asserts that all sane people want to be their best selves and to achieve their highest potential. But, the addict must be helped to learn or relearn that only with the Creator as their guide can they totally turn around and be who they were ordained to be. In the words of Alcohol Anonymous, “there are some things that must be turned over to a higher power.”

b. Unity of Family Training – African American addicts often come from families that have been fractured in some way. The desire to unite one’s family can give an addict an admirable goal that begins with them. In other words, the addict must be taught that family is valuable and that their sobriety only aids in the unity of his or her family. That family may include parents, children, spouses, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and/or a family of non-blood friends such as a church family. Whatever its composition, the addict should have as a goal being one who contributes to the well-being, harmony and strengthening of a family.

c. Self-Determination Training – The road back from addiction is arduous and long. It is a series of small steps, small actions, and small decisions made daily that when combined equal continued sobriety. Such sobriety is not possible unless persons are trained to define themselves as overcomers, as competent, as valuable and as part of a larger unit that cares about their wellbeing. Self-determination is less about how many months one can claim sobriety and more about how long one can define themselves (through how they treat themselves and others) as the wonderful creation that God loves.

d. Personal Responsibility Training – Anyone can recite the history of racism blacks have and continue to face in America. We can also discuss at length how many parents have failed to properly parent children and give them the opportunities that children deserve. We also know that the public school system has never befriended black children, especially boys, nor has the capitalistic American economic system. However, as Frederick Douglas showed during slavery, as Rosa Parks showed us during the modern civil rights movement, and as President Obama has shown us in this era, less important than how parents or white people treat us, is how we treat ourselves. If life is not a “crystal stair” we are still responsible for climbing. No one else can do this for us. So, personal responsibility training helps addicts understand that yes the forces that have been and continue to be against them are real. However, they must also be taught that they have a duty to still be sober as they take responsibility for what they will do with whatever circumstances life sends their way.

e. Creativity Training – All people need to create to exercise their God-likeness; in the beginning God “created.” Such creativity training would include helping addicts determine their creative assets and what they are passionate about doing. Some may be moved by viewing African American paintings, photography, poetry, architecture, or sculptures. Many adults may never have viewed the creative artistry that is so plentiful in their own community. How wonderful would it be to host an open house where artists of all types display their creations and discuss the creative process with those who are working to overcome addictions. The aim is not to suggest to persons that they are to work to become painters, sculptors, architects, etc. Instead, the aim is to affirm that all people are creative and to help all addicts and those in recovery begin to become creative not destructive. Such an open house may birth a chef, a graphic designer, a baker, a wood carver, a bead maker or one of a million other creative possibilities.

f. Community Building Training – None of us are our best selves disconnected from a community. We do not stand as tall; we are more selfish; we are less compassionate of the concerns and needs of others. The aim of community building training is ending thinking that makes people believe that they exist as individuals who simply live, eat and sleep somewhere. Such thinking deadens the understanding of the communally toxic nature of using and selling drugs, over-indulging in alcohol, being a sex addict, being a power addict or behaving in ways that destroy one’s body and mind. Helping to build and sustain a community brings full circle all that the addict (perhaps assisted by a professional counselor or social worker) needs to reach sobriety and/or new ways of living in the world. Community building will require daily faith, the participation in and encouragement of a family, determination, taking responsibility and certainly creativity.

V. Songs the Speak to the Moment

Fighting a drug addiction is exhausting, frustrating and enraging; it takes exceptional people to fight and remain free from drugs or other addictions. This song reassures people that God will set them free from the sins that bind them.

Shake Yourself Loose

VERSE 1: (Trio)

(Hey...hey..hey...hey)

Said you been bound up - Lookin' for a way to break free
Devil's had you tied up - Listen to these words from me
Your situation may seem hopeless but it's not the end
Though you are burdened and have shackles on your feet

CHORUS:

(Now)... I... want you to know - You're about to break loose (unison)
Jesus took the keys... and gave 'em to you
(So...Here's what you gotta do)
Shake loose... everything that binds you up - Who told you that you can't make it
When God says that you can shake it - Shake loose... everything that binds you up
Praise Him like it's your last chance - Get up and do the David dance

BRIDGE:

Don't let the enemy keep you in bondage
Praise your way through - Come on and shake loose
Every worry, every care
Praise your way through - Come on and shake loose

....Those chains that bind you.... should.... only remind
Praise your way through - Come on and shake loose
Problems... know that.... He will.... solve them
Praise your way through - Come on and shake loose

Shake.... yourself.... loose
(Lift.... your hands) Lift your hands
(Come on and let's dance) Come on ...let's dance

Shake.... yourself.... loose
(Scream and shout) Scream and shout
(He brought you out) He brought you out.¹⁶

The issue of drug addiction is fundamentally a moral issue and a personal choice that destroys the ability of a person to find the inner resources to take charge of his or her life, feel loved, and maintain a sense of empowerment. The lyrics of this song reinforce

Romans 6:22 which states, "But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage is sanctification."

Imagine Me

Imagine me
loving what I see when the mirror looks at me cause I,
I imagine me.
In a place, of no insecurities
And I'm finally happy cause
I imagine me.

Letting go of all of the ones who hurt me
Cause they never did deserve me,
Can you imagine me.
Saying no to thoughts that try to control me
Remembering all you told me
Lord can you imagine me?
Over what my momma said
And healed from what my daddy did
And I wanna live and not read that page again.

(Chorus)

Imagine me, being free, trusting you totally finally I can...
Imagine me
I admit it was hard to see
You being in love with someone like me
But finally I can...
Imagine me

Being strong
And not letting people break me down
You won't get that joy this time around
Can you imagine me?
In a world (in a world) where nobody has to live afraid
Because of your love fears gone away
Can you imagine me?

Letting go of my past
And glad I have another chance
And my heart will dance

'Cause I don't have to read that page again
(Repeat Chorus 1x)

Kirk talks:

This song is dedicated to people like me, those that struggle with insecurities, acceptance and even self esteem, you never felt good enough, you never felt pretty enough but

imagine God whispering in your ear letting you know that everything that has happened is now.

(Vamp)

Gone, Gone, It's Gone, all gone

Repeat 8

Kirk remarks

(Oh It's All Gone. Every Sin, Every Mistake, Every Failure. It's all gone!

Depression Gone By Faith, It's Gone

Low Self Esteem, Halleluiah It's Gone, All Gone,

It's Gone. All My Scars, All My Pain, It's In The Past. It's Yesterday. It's All Gone.

(Can't Believe It's Gone). What Your Mother Did, What your Father Did, Halleluiah (It's Gone All Gone Oh Whoa))¹⁷

Testimonies and confessions contain part of the spiritual and personal convictions and willpower one needs to liberate him or herself from compulsive individual choices and seemingly insurmountable social circumstances. The lyrics of this song reinforce that the "one who confesses and forsakes addiction will obtain mercy." You just have to believe.

Believe

(Chorus: Stic man)

I know I can, I'm sure I can

get this dope out my veins

I believe I can, I know I can

I'm sure I can break free from the chains

(Verse 1: Stic man)

I can heal, I can change a fight and never give up

I've made up my mind I can do it and that's what up

I'll learn I'll find what I need to help myself

I understand that it's up to me to take care of my health

I'll a prove to the world that I can get back up

on my feet and I'll do it for myself for me

and for my family, they only want the best for me

they wanna see me in control of my destiny

Repeat Chorus

(Verse 2: Stic man)

Ain't no easy way out, but I made it this far

many days I slip back frustrated cos it's hard

but it's my time now to make the changes in my heart

And I ain't looking back right here today is where I'm a start

I believe in myself, I just made some bad choices

I still love myself and I ain't ready for the coffin

I'm reaching out to my loved ones for they support
and no negative thought is gonna stop me just (watch)¹⁸

VI. Books On Overcoming Addiction

The following books may be helpful to churches who want to begin Anti-Addiction programs or at least begin developing resources for those in their congregations who are battling drug, alcohol, sex, or food addictions.

- Robinson-Wood, Tracy. The Convergence of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender: Multiple Identities in Counseling. (3rd ed.) New York, NY: Prentice Hall, 2008. The author, herself an African American, examines the dominant cultural beliefs and values in the United States and discusses how their nearly wholesale acceptance as "normal" and "better" can perpetuate feelings of inadequacy, shame, confusion, and distrust on both sides of the counseling "couch." Embracing feminist and diversity theories, methods, and techniques, while injecting humor and fascinating stories, Robinson-Wood has created a practical volume.
- Hoffman, John and Susan Froemke and Sheila Nevins, Ed. Addiction: Why Can't They Just Stop? New York, NY: Radale Books, 2007. This companion book to the HBO documentary of the same name sheds light on the hidden American epidemic of addiction. This book argues that the time has come for the blame to stop and the healing to begin.
- Peele, Stanton. Truth About Addiction and Recovery. New York, NY: Fireside Press, 1992. This book suggests that much of the work of addiction recovery is a personal decision that requires personal work. He also does not tout programs that are historically used to help persons overcome addiction.

Notes

1. Dayton, T. Trauma and Addiction: Ending the Cycle of Pain Through Emotional Literacy. Deerfield Beach, FL: HCI Publishing, 2000. p. 5.
2. Inciardi, James A., Dorothy Lockwood, and Anne E. Pottieger. Women and Crack-Cocaine. New York: Macmillan, 1993. p. 107.
3. Ibid., p. 116.
4. Ibid., p. 61.
5. Ibid., p. 73.
6. Ibid., p. 132.
7. Ibid., p. 132.
8. Ibid., p. 133.
9. Ibid., pp. 58-9.
10. Winfree, T.K., C. Griffiths and C. Sellers. "Social Learning Theory, Drug Use, and American Indian Youths: A Cross-Cultural Test." Omaha, NB: Justice Quarterly 6 (1989): 393-417.

11. Joseph, Janice and Patricia Pearson. "Black Youths and Illegal Drugs." Newbury Park, CA: Journal of Black Studies 32 No. 4 (March 2002): 424.
12. Oliver, William. "Black Males and Social Problems: Prevention through Afrocentric Socialization." Newbury Park, CA: Journal of Black Studies 20 No. 1 (September 1989): 19-20.
13. Ibid. p. 24.
14. Ibid. p. 25.
15. Ibid. pp 27-32.
16. Winans, Vickie. "Shake Yourself Loose." Praise & Worship. New York, NY: Zomba Recording, 2008.
17. PCO (Musical group), and Kirk Franklin. Imagine Me. Oklahoma City, OK: Christian World, Inc., 2006.
18. Dead Prez and Outlawz. "Believe." Can't Sell Dope Forever. New York, NY: Affluent Records, 2006.