

LESSON 1

American Character Builders Opioid Awareness Faith-Based Curriculum

CONNECTION FROM THE VIDEO

In the American Character Builders opioid awareness video, each person's path to opioid addiction is shown under different circumstances. Regardless of the circumstances that lead to abuse, addiction is all around us, even in what we would consider to be the most unlikely of places. We must recognize that opioid addiction is a significant problem in our community and that we are called to help those in need. The best way for us to do this is through the hope of the gospel of Jesus.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The opioid problem in America is pervasive and present in every facet of society, but the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to free any life from the bondage of addiction and redeem that life for the plan and purposes of God.

INTRODUCTION

Ask your group to tell you what they know about the opioid problem in the United States. Be sure to prompt them to share as much information and statistics as they can. If they have known someone who has dealt with opioid addiction, invite them to share should they feel comfortable doing so.

Once they have shared, take a moment and read the following statistics to them:

- 2 million Americans abuse prescription opioids every year
- 66,324 people died of opioid-related overdose from January-May 2017
- In 2012, health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for painkillers, which is the equivalent of 1 bottle per American citizen (and has since increased)
- Between the years 2001-2014, the amount of deaths caused by prescription opioid analgesics have increased by three-times
- Among Americans addicted to opioid-based drugs, more than 75% are addicted to prescription opioids received from a physician or a friend/relative
- More teenagers regularly abuse prescription opioids than marijuana, alcohol or any other drug

Now take a moment and ask your group a series of questions:

- ***Were you aware of how pervasive opioid addiction is in America? Explain.***
- ***Now that you have heard these facts concerning the opioid problem, how do you feel?***
- ***Were these facts worse or better than you had originally presumed? Explain.***

The purpose of this activity is to communicate the stark reality of the opioid crisis that is taking place all around us. If we do not already know someone who has dealt with opioid related addiction, the odds are that we will at some point. Seeing these kinds of startling statistics causes us to ask the question: why do we find ourselves in such addiction? The answer is engrained in our need for a Savior. Say something like:

- **When we hear these facts, it is truly overwhelming how many people are in the midst of addiction all around us. With so many struggling with addiction in so many different circumstances, a universal response to help hurting people seems impossible. What can we possibly do to help solve this issue? Why do we find ourselves in such addiction? In order to answer these questions, we need to turn to the pages of Scripture.**

SCRIPTURE

Luke 8:26-33; 38-39

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The book of Luke is written specifically with Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians in mind in order to give a clear picture of the power of Jesus as the Son of God. As Jesus began His ministry, He performed many signs in order to show that He was God's Son. In Luke 8:26-33, Jesus meets a man who was isolated and alone; a man who was possessed with many demons. Unable to help this man break free from his imprisonment, the people in his village had sent him away. In this passage, Jesus shows the ultimate expression of His grace and power by freeing the possessed man from his imprisonment and releasing him to serve God. Jesus has the power to heal all people in any circumstance and redeem their lives for the sake of God's glory. Although Jesus does not specifically free this man from substance abuse, He desires to use this same power through the gospel to redeem the lives of the addicted.

LESSON CONTENT

I. We Are All Living in Brokenness (Luke 8:26-27)

In this passage, we see Jesus approached by a man who is described as one who "had many demons." We know the man had been abandoned by his family and friends because the passage tells us that he was from the city and yet without clothes or a home in which to stay. The man had lost everything because of his bondage to these demons, and he was isolated and alone. Nothing and no one could free him; he was broken.

Most of us would say with confidence that we are not in bondage to supernatural powers. But we would be right to acknowledge that some of the demon-possessed man's situation is not completely foreign to us. His loneliness and isolation, his desperation for freedom and healing, and ultimately his brokenness are feelings that many of us have experienced in some measure.

When we take an honest step back and look at our lives and the world around us, it is evident that things are messed up. Something is simply not right. Things are not the way that they are supposed to be. And in our effort to fix what is broken in our lives we retreat to anything that will help us feel momentarily better. The problem is, these placeholders miss the mark because they are just that: placeholders. The result of the pursuit to heal our brokenness is only greater brokenness, and this road often manifests itself in addiction, sinful habits and meaningless direction in our lives.

People who are struggling with opioid addiction and abuse are facing a drug-related problem, but the problem is only a symptom of a much greater issue - the brokenness caused by their sin before God. This demon-possessed man was trapped in his bondage because of his brokenness, and he could not break free.

Ask your students the following question:

- *What are some things that people often use besides opioids to fix the brokenness in their lives caused by sin?*

The point of this exercise is to show your students that we find ourselves in addiction because we find ourselves in brokenness. Like the demon-possessed man, all our efforts to heal our own broken lives simply lead to more brokenness. But the man's encounter with Jesus would completely change his hopeless state.

II. Only Jesus Can Address Our Brokenness (Luke 8:28-33)

Have you ever tried to use the wrong key to unlock a door? You won't get very far. The fact of the matter is, there is only one key that was designed to open that particular door. When it comes to our brokenness, only Jesus can heal and restore our lives from addiction and hopelessness to freedom and purpose.

When the demons recognized who Jesus was, they fell to the ground in fear of his power and authority. It is at this point that Luke reveals the lengths at which this man went to free himself from his broken state. The town seized him, chained and bound him, and yet he still broke free! There was nothing he and his friends could do to heal his broken state. Yet, when face-to-face with the power of Jesus, the demons begged not to be destroyed.

All of us are broken in some way, whether through addiction or some other sin before God. And we cannot free ourselves from that brokenness, but Jesus can. It doesn't matter what kinds of brokenness you are facing; no addiction can stand against the power of Jesus Christ. Like the demon-possessed man, our addictions and sinful habits can be overcome because of what Jesus has done for us. What has Jesus done?

The Scriptures tell us in Romans 6 that “the wages of sin is death,” which means that the punishment for our sin before God is death and separation forever from Him. And Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” meaning that everyone is deserving of this death we have earned because of our sin.

But Scripture also tells us in Romans that even when we were still sinners, “Christ died for the ungodly.” Jesus died the death that we deserve because of our sin before God so that if we surrender and trust Him with our lives, we can be forgiven and freed from our brokenness. This results in “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

For those struggling with addiction to prescription opioids or any other form of addictive behavior, Jesus died so that they would no longer have to try to fill the void in their lives where Jesus belongs. When we trust in Jesus’ sacrifice and ask for healing, He will forgive us our sins and mistakes and will help us on the road to physical healing and redemption.

III. Jesus Wants to Redeem Our Lives for His Purposes (Luke 8:38-39)

Overwhelmed with thankfulness for what Jesus had done for him, the man healed of his demonic oppression sought to go with Jesus. But Jesus wanted to use the man right where he was. Instead of the man leaving the place associated with his trials, Jesus sent him back into the local village to share what God had done for Him.

God wants to use every story of brokenness as a testimony of the power of Jesus. He wants the world to know that He can use the brokenness of people for His glory and kingdom. He wants to do the same for people who struggle with opioid addiction and abuse. Jesus desires to forgive us of our sins and heal our deepest need, but He also wants to invite us into the work of God throughout the world.

Many times, people who struggle with opioids or other kinds of drug abuse are considered a risk in the church. They are often looked upon differently than others who have sinned against God and are dismissed as people who are not qualified to serve God. But Jesus desires to use all redeemed people for His glory, and we should not discount those who have struggled with these issues.

Before we close today, we should acknowledge that forgiveness in Christ is the beginning of a relationship with Him. When we surrender to Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we are saved and welcomed into God’s family. But this does not mean our struggles and temptations disappear. Instead, the apostle Paul says that we are to take off our old selves and put on Christ.

For those who struggle with opioid abuse and addiction, the gospel is the hope they need to overcome the evil present in their hearts. This is the first and most important step but healing also comes through rehab and programs designed to equip the addicted people to overcome their addiction. For those addicted to opioids, this is the

first step towards being used by God in the future. Encourage them to lead people they know towards this practical healing.

Close your time in Prayer. Invite your students to pray for:

- Their generation, their country, and their community as all of us wrestle with responding to the opioid crisis
- Those who are struggling with brokenness who do not know the Gospel
- For your church to be a light in the midst of this darkness

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you cope with brokenness as a Christian? How do the people without Jesus cope with brokenness?
- Does Jesus really heal brokenness in our lives, in our world? How have you seen examples of this?
- How has God taken the hard things that have happened in your life and used them for to minister to others?
- How could God begin to use you to respond to the opioid crisis?

*American Character Builders gratefully acknowledges the efforts of **Steve Browning, Clay Wyatt, Jeremy Horton and Lisa Davis**, members of the Shades Mountain Baptist Church staff, Vestavia Hills, AL, in preparing this Bible Study.*