

One Little Puff

Pastor Phill just celebrated his 10th anniversary at his church. The church, located in an affluent community, also celebrated this man who had enriched the congregation with wonderful sermons and his family contributed so much to the church family. What can we say about his son Mark? He was active in the community and loved by all. He was active in the church and an "A" student all through high school. Like his father, Mark was well-spoken, tall, and handsome. It was his graduation night, and he and some high-school friends were invited to a party at a doctor's home to celebrate.

At the party, Mark met an attractive young woman who offered him some crack cocaine. She told him that one little puff wouldn't hurt. She also told him that if he was going to work with people, it was something he should understand. He tried it and was overwhelmed because he said he had never felt so good in all of his life. He told her that if one time felt this good, what would the second time be like? He smoked the pipe and died right there sitting on the couch. His friends decided to go to the beach and left him sitting there. They thought he had passed out. A few hours later the doctor and his wife came home and found Mark's body. Needless to say, the parents were traumatized by their gruesome discovery, and Mark's family was completely devastated and still is 20 years later. Prior to that event, Mark's father never worried about his son and drugs. He believed Mark knew better.

Let's talk about this tragedy. Sadly, painful events like this happen hundreds of thousands of times every year. Because it's not just drugs like cocaine or methamphetamine killing our children. Alcohol poisoning and killings caused by drivers operating motor vehicles while they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol are as common as drug-related deaths. And you may not know this, but the awful effects of drugs are also very closely related to deaths caused by suicide.

So, my question is, where does the blame lie for Mark's death? Some may blame the dealer who sold the cocaine or the supplier who sold the drug to the dealer. Some will tell you it was the farmer who grew the plants. Was it the girl who shared the pipe with Mark? How about Mark's parents - why didn't they teach him about cocaine? Sadly most people will tell you it was Mark's own fault because he smoked it. Who have I missed? What about the schools, the politicians, Congress, the President? The media? Oh, sure, I'm sure Mark's parents wondered why would God allow such a thing to happen to their beautiful son. Many people might say, it is what it is. It's sad but bad things just happen.

It's called the Blame Game. We use it all the time as a coping mechanism.

There are positive aspects of the blame game. When you consider accountability and responsibility, assigning blame holds individuals or entities accountable for their actions. Hopefully, this helps motivate them to take corrective measures and/or to make amends.

It can also lead to justice and closure. Identifying the cause of an issue can lead to a sense of justice being served, providing closure for those affected by the situation.

And if we are lucky, learning and improvement will take place. The blame game can encourage introspection and learn from mistakes, leading to improved processes and outcomes in the future.

And there are negative aspects of the blame game. When you point the finger at someone else it is a way to avoid personal responsibility. Blaming others can be a way to shirk personal accountability and deflect attention from one's own actions, decisions, or lack of actions.

Blaming others often causes conflict and polarization. Assigning blame can lead to disputes and animosity, particularly when parties have differing viewpoints on the cause of an issue.

But the main negative effect of the blame game is the hindrance to progress. Focusing solely on blame can hinder problem-solving and positive change, diverting energy from finding solutions to dwelling on the past.

So when a child dies because of drug use, or substance abuse how do we assign responsibility?

What does the word of God have to say? Let's turn to Proverbs 22:6 (NIV): "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Here's another in Proverbs 10:17 (NIV): "Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray."

In 1st Timothy 5:8: But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Finally, Matthew 18:6 clearly warns of the consequences: In Matthew 18:6, we are warned, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." This is a grave indictment of those who lead our young astray.

It sounds clear to me. The family is commanded to teach the children about the things that could lead them astray. Are we not all brothers and sisters in the family of Christ?

So what should we teach?

Honoring Your Body: The Bible teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This principle suggests that we should take care of our bodies and avoid substances that could harm them.

In 1988, an 18-month-old girl was playing in her aunt's backyard and fell head-first into an eight-inch well. She was stuck there, 22 feet below the surface in an eight-inch well for 56 hours. ABC television made a movie about it. They called her Everybody's Baby: The Rescue of Jessica McClure. I've heard that drug addiction is a lot like falling into a deep, dark well. Imagine, you are living your life then all of a sudden you fall into the well. At first, it's not too bad, just a bit scary. But the further you go, the scarier it gets.

The hole is so dark you can't see anything. It's like being in a nightmare. But you keep falling, you feel like you can't stop. It's as if you're trapped, and you can't get out.

You're all alone in this dark place, and you can't talk to anyone. You are all on your own. Society will scorn you. At first, your family and friends are up above, worried about you, but they can't reach you. Often your family will abandon you. It's a lonely and scary place to be. But all the time, you keep falling until you either die of an overdose or find a way out.

You may wonder how can we rescue these children. Many of them will not be rescued. Too many of them will die or kill someone else. Many of them will cause irreversible damage to their body or brain.

The best way to rescue them is to keep them away from the well or cover the well. Since our government is allowing mind-altering drugs to be sold openly, that only leaves the option of protecting them with a shield of knowledge. That's why the Saving Our Children Campaign was created. The mission of the campaign is to reduce adolescent drug use.

In closing, let us remember the timeless wisdom found in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, which says, 'These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

These words remind us of the sacred duty we carry as a church community and as individuals within our families. We must teach our children the values, the discipline, and the love for God's guidance, so that they may walk in the light of His wisdom.

As we confront the challenges of drug addiction and protect our youth, let us also remember that our role extends beyond the pulpit and the pews. It extends into our homes, our conversations, and our actions. Let us be the living examples of the teachings we hold dear.

With God's grace and our unwavering commitment, we can equip the next generation to make choices that lead to a brighter, drug-free future. May our efforts be blessed, and may our children thrive in the light of His love and guidance.

Amen.

You are free to use this material in a sermon to your congregation. Any other use will require permission. You may want to tell your congregation that we have prepared material to help them teach their children about the dangers of drugs.

Copyright 2023, Tom Monson and The Saving Our Children Campaign.