

Elephants in the Room: The Tipsy Elephant
Various Scriptures
Small Group Discussion Guide

Warm-up question:

- What sort of context did you grow up in with regard to the use of alcohol? Was it an issue? If so, was it forbidden, over-used, or just a normal part of life?

1. This past Sunday, Pastor Josh talked about the issue of drinking alcohol. Let's review.
 - a. What was his main point behind Martin Luther's illustration of the drunken cowboy who falls off one side or the other of the horse? (What do these two sides represent on this topic?)
 - b. Josh stated, "**The primary way that most of the world approaches alcohol is to abuse it.**" Why do you think that is (provide Josh's reason or your own)? Discuss.
 - c. The other incorrect approach to the use of alcohol—and often the ones toward which Christians default, especially in more conservative circles—is avoidance. Josh summarized: "**Making the avoidance of alcohol an ultimate rule; it's when you make not drinking the source of your standing before God, and a mandate for others.**" What does an over-emphasis on avoidance of alcohol turn into (provide your own or Josh's reason)?
 - d. Why is it important to be clear about these two sides (not only with alcohol, but with all issues)?
2. **TAKE TURNS READING the passage below (Jer 2:12-13).**

God says, "'Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,' declares the LORD. ¹³ 'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'"

- a. How does this passage identify the problem regarding alcohol, etc.?
 - b. There are a lot of feeling phrases for such a short passage – “be appalled,” “shudder with great horror,” and “have forsaken me.” Why do you think Jeremiah would describe the situation this way? What implications does this have for our own attitudes?
 - c. What are some “cisterns,” or as Josh says, “poor substitutes” that we look to today other than God, to fill our soul? (Don't just speak generally: Is there anything in your life that you place before God to satisfy your soul?)
3. Let's investigate the abuse of alcohol.

First, let's look at some statistics:

- a. There are more than 12 million alcoholics in the U.S.
- b. In the United States, a person is killed in an alcohol-related car accident every 30 minutes.
- c. About 19% of Americans between 12 and 20 have engaged in binge drinking in the last month.
- d. 28% of kids in the same age group have ridden in the car with a drunk driver in the last month.

Second, let's look at Scripture:

- a. Rom 1:25 - "Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. So they worshiped the things God made, but not the Creator himself, who is to be praised forever."
- b. Prov 20.1: "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."

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- c. Prov 23:31-32: Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.”

QUESTIONS:

- a. What light do these Scripture passages shed on the aforementioned statistics?
 - b. How do these statistics shed light on the reason for these Scripture passages?
 - c. Why do you think that sometimes we need statistics to believe God’s Word rather than trusting Scripture first?
4. We’ve looked at the problem; now let’s investigate the answer at which Jeremiah 2 hinted. **READ THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT FROM JOSH’S SERMON.**
- You may remember the story in **John 4**, when Jesus meets the woman at the well. She’s been trying to satisfy her soul through relationships with men. Jesus asks her to draw him a drink of water from the well, and then he tells her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Just a few chapters later, he tells the crowd, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” (Jn 7.38).
- a. What answers does this passage give for the problem of alcohol abuse (or any kind of abuse)? Are they helpful to you?
 - b. Why do you think Jesus and the biblical authors use the metaphor of water so often to describe how God can satisfy your soul?
 - c. The above may seem like an easy answer, but why don’t we live as if God were our water? What are the obstacles that keep us from doing so?
 - d. Sometimes God’s water flows through others to us; they can be sort of a conduit of Jesus to us. How have others in your small group and in the church been a conduit for Jesus’ water to flow into you? How can you take better advantage of this?
5. Scripture not only warns against abuse of alcohol, but praises its moderate use:
- Psalm 104:15 – “...wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.”
 - 1 Timothy 4.4-5 “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”
 - Ecclesiastes 9:7 “Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.”
 - **QUESTION: What do you learn from these passages about God’s attitude about alcohol? Does anything surprise you?**
6. Pastor Josh provides 5 principles in his sermon “to stay on the horse”:
- a. Don’t get drunk (Eph 5:18)
 - b. Your body is God’s (1 Cor 6:19-20)
 - c. Check your motives (1 Cor 10:31)
 - d. Don’t make a fellow Christian stumble (1 Cor 8:9)
 - e. Obey governmental laws (Rom 13:1).
- QUESTION: With which of these boundaries do you most struggle?**

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7. Josh summarized the idea of his sermon by saying, **“God’s gifts bring flavor to our lives when kept in their proper place.”** This broad principle over alcohol that applies to many issues in our lives is the freedom found in keeping God’s gifts in their proper place. We can fall off one of two sides of the horse: avoidance or abuse, legalism or license, self-righteousness or compulsion, trying to earn your salvation or trying to find it in something else.
QUESTION: To which of these two sides do you lean? Explain.

8. **PRAYER:** Among our prayers for each other, let’s pray for any of us who struggle with alcohol, struggle with the damaging effects of it, or struggle with the broader principle of abuse or self-righteousness.