

# Fool Proof: A Study in Proverbs

## Week 6 | Alcohol

*Mark and Shelly Nelson, authors*

### Day 1

Maybe you're a teetotaler, just a social drinker, or maybe not even the legal drinking age. You may have been raised by an alcoholic parent, be living with an alcoholic family member, or be struggling with alcoholism yourself. Wherever you are on the spectrum, you can't ignore the impact alcohol has on our lives.

Welcoming Bruce back next Sunday, let's hear a brief message from him as he's been preparing to share what wisdom we can glean from Proverbs about how to handle alcohol as we seek to live out God's will for our lives.

Watch this video, then spend some time in prayer and meditation with the questions below.

<https://vimeo.com/572988461>

### Ask yourself

- In the video, Bruce said most will agree believers should not get drunk, but should you drink at all or is it OK to drink occasionally? What do you think?
- What are some consequences you've experienced or seen in others' lives when someone drinks too much?
- Some like to study topics like this to find a proof text for their point or a loophole for their actions. What do you most hope to gain from our study of Proverbs on this topic?

### Read

**Proverbs 20:1**

*Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;  
whoever is led astray by them is not wise.*

### Pray

*Transcendent God above all, you exist beyond that which we can comprehend.  
Your power is higher than any other power. Your wisdom is deeper than  
anything we can understand.*

*Though we believe in our own minds that we are wise, help us grasp the surpassing greatness of your power and wisdom. Spirit, as your people, help us see beyond our own beliefs and submit our will to your holiness. Guide us along the path that leads to joy and fulfillment found in you.*

*Jesus, shepherd us away from trouble and destruction. Hear our prayer. Heal our spirits. Replace our weakness with your power.  
Amen.*

## **Talk about it**

As believers we can be as iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17) - helping prepare each other for defense in the spiritual battles we face each day. But too often we shy away from discussing sensitive topics. We try to avoid conversations that might upset our relationships or reveal our “secret sins,” missing out on the very help we need to live a transformed life. Who could you talk to this week?

- In your discussion, you’re not looking to fact-check anyone or question morality, just start a conversation: Is it ever appropriate to drink alcohol? If so, under what circumstances? When is it never appropriate to drink alcohol?
- Our goal in this series is to become “fool proof.” From our single verse today, what is your takeaway about alcohol and handling it in a wise way?
- Bruce challenged us to look up references to alcohol in scripture. Check out [BibleGateway.com](http://BibleGateway.com) and search for “wine”, “beer” or “drink”. (*You may find over 300 depending on the translation you choose.*) Skimming through the results, what patterns do you see in the references? How do these patterns impact your answers in the previous conversation?

# Day 2

*Mark and Shelly Nelson, authors*

Today let's look at the core passage for Bruce's upcoming sermon and what it says about our heart's desire.

## Read

### Proverbs 23:29-35

- <sup>29</sup> Who has woe? Who has sorrow?  
Who has strife? Who has complaints?  
Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?*
- <sup>30</sup> Those who linger over wine,  
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.*
- <sup>31</sup> Do not gaze at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
when it goes down smoothly!*
- <sup>32</sup> In the end it bites like a snake  
and poisons like a viper.*
- <sup>33</sup> Your eyes will see strange sights,  
and your mind will imagine confusing things.*
- <sup>34</sup> You will be like one sleeping on the high seas,  
lying on top of the rigging.*
- <sup>35</sup> "They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt!  
They beat me, but I don't feel it!  
When will I wake up  
so I can find another drink?"*

## Ask yourself

- Do I have someone in my life that I visualize when I read this passage?
- What is the allure of wine if it bites like a snake, impacts vision, confuses thinking and causes staggering?

## Read what others say

Some may wonder how anyone could long for another drink after over indulging and knowing it could make them feel the way this passage describes. These two authors provide a glimpse at what our hearts truly desire and how the world seeks to fulfill that desire:

From Dr. Gary R. Collins:

“Stated concisely, human beings have an inner need for a real and growing relationship with God. When this craving is denied, unrecognized and unfilled, there is a search for something else which will fill the vacuum.”<sup>1</sup>

From Steven J. Lennox:

“Don’t believe the ads’ could be written as the caption for [Proverbs] 23:31. Beer, liquor, and wine advertisers spend millions making their products look attractive: ‘They will bring you acceptance, women (or men), sophistication, and happiness.’ *Don’t believe the ads.* Instead go to the detoxification unit of your hospital, to a rescue mission, to a homeless shelter, or to nearly any downtown alley if you want to see what drunkenness is really like.”<sup>2</sup>

## Pray

- We can all fall into unhealthy ways of managing the stress of life. Alcohol dependence is just one. Bring God your sorrow, your strife, your stress. Speak it out loud or write it on a piece of paper. Admit your life is unmanageable when you try to control it on your own.
- Ask the Spirit to show you what you’re relying on to fill the “God-shaped hole” in your life - maybe it’s alcohol or drugs, but maybe its work or attention from others through social media, sex or physical appearance, recognition you receive or power you hold, etc.
- Confess your need for God’s love to fill your heart’s desire and for his power to overcome the temptation to seek satisfaction in any earthly substitute.
- Thank God for his forgiveness through Jesus and accept his mercy and grace that frees you from the bondage these other powers may hold over you.

## Talk about it

- Galatians 6:2 says to carry each other’s burdens. Is there any sorrow, strife or stress you shared with God that you can allow your partner to help you carry?
- What do you crave? What do you wake up each morning hoping to find? What is the longing of your heart that God longs to fill?

---

<sup>1</sup> Gary R. Collins, Ph.D., *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Waco, TX:Word, Inc., 1980), 383.

<sup>2</sup> Steven J. Lennox, *Proverbs: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998)

# Day 3

Mark and Shelly Nelson, authors

What's the most curious item you've seen in the middle of the road? You know what it's like — driving full speed on Interstate 75 and there it is blocking an entire lane of traffic. I feel bad for the people who were obviously moving and lost a very nice chair or part of a sectional sofa.

While people may gawk a bit, slow down to avoid an accident while asking, "what was that?" I have yet to see anyone pull over, park on the shoulder, and wander onto the road to examine it closely or plop down to see if it's comfortable. Of course not! That would be dangerous!

That's the same warning we see in our passage today. Yesterday verse 29 asked us all the "who has" questions, and today is our answer... "those who *linger*."

## Read

### Proverbs 23:30-31

<sup>30</sup> *Those who linger over wine,  
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.*

<sup>31</sup> *Do not gaze at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
when it goes down smoothly!*

## Ask Yourself

- Have I ever spent a bit more time in a situation I knew wasn't good for me?
- When was I willing to try something "just this once" that I knew I probably shouldn't?
- What is it (or *who* is it) that catches my eye every time and entices me to think about how I would feel if it (they) were mine?

## Something to Consider

These two verses are definitely talking about wine, but they follow a similar pattern we see in other passages about temptation.

James 1:13-15 says individuals are not tempted by God, but *tempted when they are **dragged away** by their own **evil desire** and **enticed**. Then after **desire has conceived**, it **gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is full-grown, **gives birth to death**.*

How does this align with our verses today?

- First, we *linger*. The idea behind this word is "spending a lot of time with" wine or regularly putting ourselves in the presence of temptation.

- Next, we sample. We build up a tolerance and need something more, something stronger to achieve the same feeling we did when we first started down this path.
- Then we admire. We become blind to the negative impact on our lives and become drawn to the alluring nature of this temptation.
- Finally, we swallow. The taste of this temptation is what satisfies us.

The word in James 1:14 for “dragged away” describes using bait on a hook to catch fish. The fish is safe being in the presence of the bait. It’s when it starts to nibble, admire the lure, and finally swallow that it leads to death.

## Read what others say

From J.D. Barry:

“We have a say in the progression of events in our lives—it all has to do with the doors we open and the ones we close. Overcoming sin happens when we choose not to open the doors that lead to it; hence Jesus tells us to pray, “lead us not into temptation” (Matt 6:13). We must choose the path that keeps us away from sin and leads us toward faith.”<sup>3</sup>

## Pray

- Recognize God’s holiness. He is so “other than” — set apart from evil — that he cannot and will not tempt us. Thank God for his faithfulness. He walks beside us through trials which refine us that we may be holy as he is holy.
- Confess to God your weaknesses. He already knows our hearts and is aware of what temptations challenge us. Ask God for his protection. Once you’ve admitted where you are weak, welcome his correction and guidance to remove the evil desires that entice you so that you are not dragged away.
- Pray in the name of Jesus. He endured the consequence of our sin and overcame death that we might live life to the fullest.

## Talk about it

- How do you recognize when you’re “lingering” with temptation? Do you feel an internal nudge to move away from it?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 together. Based on the previous question, how is God at work in your life to shepherd you away from danger?
- What can you do to be more attentive to God’s protective promptings?

---

<sup>3</sup> Barry, J. D. (2014). *James: Simply the Gospel* (p. 15). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

# Day 4

*Mark and Shelly Nelson, authors*

They are always watching. Not “Big Brother,” but the younger, impressionable people in our lives. You may have heard it said, “your actions speak louder than words” or “I can’t hear what you’re saying because your actions speak so loudly.”

We’re wrestling this week to gain wisdom when it comes to alcohol. You can decide what works for you, but how do you influence others, particularly your own children?

## Ask yourself

- What influenced my attitudes toward alcohol?
- How are my attitudes and actions regarding alcohol impacting others? Do I come off self-righteous or create curiosity? Am I setting an example? Providing guidance?
- Is what I’ve decided that works in my life what will also work best for others?

## Read

### Proverbs 31:1–9

*The sayings of King Lemuel—an inspired utterance his mother taught him.*

*<sup>2</sup> Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb!*

*Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers!*

*<sup>3</sup> Do not spend your strength on women,  
your vigor on those who ruin kings.*

*<sup>4</sup> It is not for kings, Lemuel—  
it is not for kings to drink wine,  
not for rulers to crave beer,*

*<sup>5</sup> lest they drink and forget what has been decreed,  
and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.*

*<sup>6</sup> Let beer be for those who are perishing,  
wine for those who are in anguish!*

*<sup>7</sup> Let them drink and forget their poverty  
and remember their misery no more.*

*<sup>8</sup> Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.*

*<sup>9</sup> Speak up and judge fairly;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

## Pray

Today, find a quiet place to have a conversation with God. Pull up an empty chair or take a walk outside. People seem to have earbuds in “talking to themselves” all the time. *You won't look weird! At least **we** promise not to laugh.*

- Talk to God about alcohol as if you were talking to a friend. Tell God what you learned as you were growing up. Explain why you feel the way you do about drinking.
- Ask him for wisdom, for how you should guide anyone else who looks up to you, specifically your children.
- Then be silent. Listen. Silence is a posture of our hearts that says, “I’m done thinking; I have all the answers.” Be aware of scripture that comes to mind and read it aloud as if you’re hearing the other side of your conversation.

## Read what others say

From Dr. Gary Collins:

“Parental example is the most influential factor in determining whether or not children will develop chemical dependency. When parents regularly rely on drugs and alcohol, children learn to do the same. When parents rigidly prohibit and condemn the use of chemical substances, children often react by partaking of this ‘forbidden fruit.’”

“More effective is an open attitude about drugs and alcohol, a recognition of their dangers, an encouragement of moderation if not abstinence, and an example of parents who enjoy life without having to rely on drugs to meet problems or to enjoy fellowship with others.”<sup>4</sup>

## Explore on your own

Some recent studies have noted some troubling trends in the drinking habits of Americans. This short [article](#) from the news site *Axios* includes some recent data.

## Talk about it

- Who/what was the biggest influence in your life regarding how you handle alcohol? Why did you choose to be open to that influence?
- What guidance did you receive from your parents about drinking? How does that impact your decisions now?
- In whose lives do you have the greatest influence? How is your attitude/approach to alcohol helping them grow in wisdom to handle this topic in their lives?

---

<sup>4</sup> Gary R. Collins, Ph.D., *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Waco, TX:Word, Inc., 1980), 392.

# Day 5

*Mark and Shelly Nelson, authors*

We asked ourselves on Day 1 what we were really hoping to gain from our study this week. As we've searched Proverbs for wisdom regarding alcohol, we've definitely realized it's a deeper question than is drinking right or wrong. We've recognized the consequences of drunkenness and identified the dangers of lingering with temptation. One more theme to explore as we consider this topic.

## Read

### Proverbs 21:17

*Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;  
Whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich.*

### Proverbs 23:17-21

<sup>17</sup> *Do not let your heart envy sinners,  
but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.*  
<sup>18</sup> *There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.*  
<sup>19</sup> *Listen, my son, and be wise,  
and set your heart on the right path:*  
<sup>20</sup> *Do not join those who drink too much wine  
or gorge themselves on meat,*  
<sup>21</sup> *for drunkards and gluttons become poor,  
and drowsiness clothes them in rags.*

## Ask Yourself

- How much of your budget do you spend on “pleasure”? What would you consider extravagant?
- Does your heart long for (envy) the “lifestyles of the rich and famous” ...their entertainment, their food, their wine?

## Read what others say

From John Gill:

“Let the fear of God be always before thine eyes and in thine heart; be continually in the exercise of fear, which is attended with faith and trust in the Lord; with love and affection to him, and joy and delight in him; be constantly employed in the duties of religion, private and public, which the fear of God includes; and this will be a preservative from envying,

murmuring, and fretting at the outward happiness of wicked men; and from joining with them in their evil ways.”<sup>5</sup>

From Focus on the Family:

The Bible never gives detailed instructions about drinking. It *does*, however, give principles every Christian should consider. ... Christians have a responsibility to regulate *all* of their behavior in *every* area of life according to the law of *love* ([James 2:8](#)). So, drinking should be handled with prayer and careful consideration.

- If someone does decide to drink, they should guard against the progressive nature of alcoholism (the tendency to move from a free choice to a chemical addiction). It's particularly important to be aware of any family history related to alcoholism, as this can increase the chances of a person losing control.
- Minors should obey the law and abstain from any use of alcohol.
- Remember the advice Paul gives about stumbling blocks in [1 Corinthians 10:23-33](#): The question we should ask ourselves isn't what may or may not be permissible — that's a self-centered approach. Instead, we should ask how our choices (and how we communicate our perspectives) might impact other people ([Philippians 2:3-4](#)).<sup>6</sup>

## Talk about it

- How do you steward what God has given you to provide for your needs?
- Today's passages focus on being zealous for God and not the things of this world. As we consider alcohol or any area of life, what demonstrates to others where our commitment truly lies?
- Verse 23:19 admonishes us to be wise and set our hearts on the right path. What does that look like according to verses 20-21? Can you say you're on the right path?

## Pray

*Oh, LORD, Creator and Provider. In the beginning you made all things and called them good. Your creation provides for our needs and excites our senses with beauty and variety. With the Fall, we know we have taken what you've given for our pleasure and perverted it to bring us harm.*

*Give us wisdom in how we handle your good gifts, both in public and in private. Draw our hearts to you, that we find full satisfaction in you. Protect us from comparing the joy you give to the temporal joy we see exploited in this world.*

Pray for any specific actions you've realized you need to take as a result of this week's study. Ask for his power, through the name of Jesus, to help you be zealous.

---

<sup>5</sup> John Gill. <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/proverbs-23-17.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Christians and Social Drinking*. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/christians-and-social-drinking/>

## Coming next week

Next week, we're going to deal with a topic that Proverbs speaks to quite a bit — sex. A whole lot has changed since Proverbs was written, but the devastating consequences of sexual sin is not one of them. The Wise Father of Proverbs has some wisdom to teach us in this area.