

Smashing Idols

Week 3 | Drugs and Alcohol

Lisa Scheffler, author

Statistics can't tell you everything, but they can sure shine light on an issue.

From the news site, Axios:

A [survey from late 2020](#) found 75% of Americans increased their alcohol intake during the pandemic to include at least one more day per month, while women, in particular, increased their alcohol intake by 39% compared to 2019.

Another [survey conducted by the American Psychological Association](#) this year found nearly one in four Americans reported drinking more specifically to combat pandemic-related stress, and [a separate study](#) found women had a greater increase in excessive drinking than men, to the point that their intake levels [were almost equal](#).¹

According to *The Atlantic*

“Even before COVID-19 arrived on our shores, the consequences of [the prevalence and availability of alcohol] were catching up with us. From 1999 to 2017, the [number of alcohol-related deaths in the U.S. doubled](#), to more than 70,000 a year—making alcohol one of the leading drivers of the decline in American life expectancy.”²

From the Center for Disease Control:

“Nearly 841,000 people have died since 1999 from a drug overdose.¹ Over 70% of drug overdose deaths in 2019 involved an [opioid](#)...³

Of course, behind those statistics are people. The mom crippled by anxiety who hides vodka in her water bottle. The delivery driver who is abusing pain killers because although he's injured, he keeps working to make ends meet. The stressed-out teen who sneaks alcohol into his room because it helps him sleep.

Alcohol and drug abuse is a major issue in our nation and in our community. It's also an issue in the church. Many of you are seeing its devastating effects in the lives of friends and family.

¹ <https://www.axios.com/americans-drinking-alcohol-pandemic-29ee70d7-40ae-4e71-807a-3f4ad2ee19b8.html>

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/07/america-drinking-alone-problem/619017/>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/data/index.html>

Many of you are experiencing it yourself. It's a sensitive topic, but this week we going to talk about smashing the idols of drugs and alcohol.

Day 1

It's not hard to see alcohol and drug abuse as idolatry. The false gods of these substances are the ultimate deceivers. They promise fun and escape. "Come join the party!" they call. "We'll take away your pain and worry!"

Yet for those who linger too long, or return too frequently, the effects can be devastating. Every day we see people sacrificing their children, marriages, careers, money, and health on the altar of drugs and alcohol. Once these gods get a hold of you, their happy and carefree faces darken into the sneer of a slavedriver. It's hard to escape their chains.

We're going to start our week looking at some of what the Bible has to say directly about alcohol. Then, later in the week, we're going to consider some of the reasons why people turn to drinking and drugs in the first place and look at what God offers us instead.

As you look through the verses below, think about how they characterize drinking. If the only thing you knew about alcohol came from these verses, what would you think about it?

Read

Proverbs 20:1

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

Isaiah 5:11–12 (NIV)

*¹¹ Woe to those who rise early in the morning
to run after their drinks,
who stay up late at night
till they are inflamed with wine.*

Isaiah 5:22

*²² Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine
and champions at mixing drinks,*

Isaiah 28:7–8

⁷And these also stagger from wine

*and reel from beer:
Priests and prophets stagger from beer
and are befuddled with wine;
they reel from beer,
they stagger when seeing visions,
they stumble when rendering decisions.
⁸ All the tables are covered with vomit
and there is not a spot without filth.*

Habakkuk 2:15

*¹⁵ “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors,
pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!*

Ask yourself

- Based on just these scriptures, what are the effects of too much alcohol? What other sins can it lead to?

Pray

Let's begin this week with communal prayer. Pray this as part of a family of believers and a member of Christ's body.

Almighty God,

God of love, peace, and joy,

Only you are worthy of our devotion. You are good, holy, faithful, and trustworthy.

May we find your unending love completely satisfying. May we trust in you when stress and anxiety threaten to overwhelm us.

As a church, lead us away from the false gods of alcohol and drugs. Teach us how to love and support one another in breaking the chains of addiction. May all of us find freedom in Christ.

In your Son's holy and precious name we ask these things, Amen.

Talk about it

You will benefit from discussing God’s Word with others. The “talk about it” questions are good to answer on your own, but even better to discuss with someone else.

- How do you see alcohol and drug use being promoted in our current culture? How are the dangers of addiction being hidden?
- Why should we take the Bible’s warnings about alcohol seriously? What would it mean for us as a church if all our people were free of their addictions?

A note about “addiction”

The term “addiction” is a bit of a moving target. It’s meaning has shifted from a more clinical diagnoses to more general use. If we consider an addiction as a compulsion to engage in behavior that is (or once was) pleasurable, despite the considerable harm it causes, we can apply it to more than drug and alcohol abuse. Compulsive gambling, shopping, eating, pornography, and even playing video games or binge-watching Netflix can be considered addictions. Yet there are still those who suffer from what the American Psychiatric Association calls, substance use disorder, in mild, moderate, or severe forms.

Whatever the addiction, and however it’s defined or classified, God loves and has compassion for the addict. He wants to deliver people from their addictions.

Biblical counselor Ed Welch notes the paradox that many of those struggling with addictions feel. “Addicts make choices. They are in control. They are committed to their way of managing life. Yet, they are also enslaved and out of control.” They are overpowered by the forces the Bible warns us about “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”⁴

When fighting an enemy as powerful as alcohol or drug dependency, it is wise to use all the God-given tools at our disposal. Because substance use disorder involves “complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences”⁵ people will need to fight their addiction on several fronts — mentally, emotionally, physically, and of course spiritually.

God can and does heal people from their substance addictions. Sometimes the road is long, and the help of medical and mental health professionals is needed. We should encourage people to seek their help.

If you are struggling with any addiction, we want to come around you as a church family to do battle with you. Very few people break an addiction alone — you need a support group, people rallying around you.

⁴ Ed Welch <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/addictions-and-idolatry/>

⁵ American Society of Addiction Medicine <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323465>

Day 2

Lisa Scheffler, author

Substance abuse has been around as long as humans have been fermenting grain and fruit to make alcohol and harvesting certain plants for their pain-relieving properties. The abuse of these substances is also well documented in history. It shouldn't surprise us that the Bible addresses it.

In scripture, we have stories that connect drunkenness with debauchery and depravity. Genesis 9: 20 depicts Noah drunk, passed out, and naked. Two of his sons honor their father and cover him, the other shames him. In Genesis 19:30-38 we have a story of Lot's drunkenness leading to sexual abuse and perversion.

Proverbs gives us the longest warning against excessive drinking in the Bible. Notice the consequences it reveals.

Read

Proverbs 23:29–35

*29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?
Who has strife? Who has complaints?
Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?*

*30 Those who linger over wine,
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.
31 Do not gaze at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup,
when it goes down smoothly!*

*32 In the end it bites like a snake
and poisons like a viper.
33 Your eyes will see strange sights,
and your mind will imagine confusing things.*

*34 You will be like one sleeping on the high seas,
lying on top of the rigging.
35 "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

- What is some of the imagery in this passage that sticks with you?
- According to this passage in Proverbs, what are some of the dangers of alcohol abuse?

Reflect

I grew up during the “Just Say No” era of drug prevention education. There was a famous [1987 ad](#) that most Gen Xers are familiar with. Butter sizzles in a hot skillet. An egg enters the frame. The narrator says, “this is your brain.” The egg is cracked and dropped into the pan, “this is your brain on drugs.” The egg fries. “Any questions?”

Proverbs precedes the “Just Say No” campaign by centuries but uses a similar strategy — it illustrates the dangers of drug abuse in vivid terms.

First of all, it uses rhetorical questions to connect excessive drinking with woe, sorrow, strife and trouble. The passage invites us to fill in the specifics for ourselves. Under the influence of alcohol, people lose inhibitions. Some get angry and insulting. Some get violent and pick fights. Some withdraw into a drunken stupor and neglect their responsibilities. Because drinking impairs judgment, some drive while drunk and put themselves and others in danger.

The passage reminds us of the bloodshot eyes and bruises that come with getting falling-down-drunk, then pinpoints the problem. This warning is not for those who sip, but those who linger over wine — who stay too long in its company and take drink after drink after drink. Those who are prone to addiction should stay away from temptation— not even look at a drink, according to verse 31.

When drinking turns into alcoholism, the sorrow, woe, trouble, and strife increase exponentially. Relationships are ruined, jobs are lost, and the jovial gods who invited you to party become vipers that poison you, body and soul.

Verses 32-35 illustrate what it’s like to be drunk. The ancients knew the effects of overindulgence well, but modern science has revealed the physical causes. Binge drinking overwhelms your liver, interferes with your central nervous system, and affects parts of your brain so that you become dizzy, disoriented, and lose self-control. And yet, even knowing and experiencing all this, people who wake up with a hangover will often go looking for another drink.

Why? Why do alcohol and drugs become an idol? As memorable as the “this is your brain on drugs” commercial is, it doesn’t attempt to answer that question. It’s good advice, “to just say no” but to understand why so many people don’t, we have to look at why these substances are so tempting — that even though the dangers are well-known, people abuse them anyway.

That’s where we’ll turn our attention for the rest of the week. For today, pray for insight. Even if you don’t personally struggle with this idol, you likely know someone who does.

Pray

Human beings are not as rational as we think we are. If we were, drug abuse would have been eliminated millennia ago. Facts about the dangers are not enough. So what is? How can we turn from the powerful idols of addiction and run to worship at the feet of Jesus?

Pray about this today. Invite the Spirit to show you the root of your temptation. Pray that he would reveal the holes in your life you are trying to fill by drinking or abusing drugs. If you have not already done so, pray for the courage to name your addiction and seek help. Maybe you need to start by telling someone. Pray for the Spirit to lead you to the right person.

If alcohol and drugs are not a temptation for you, pray for others. Pray that you would have compassion and love for those who do struggle. Pray that as a church, Christ Fellowship would be a safe place for people to admit their struggles and find care and support to deal with them. Pray that you would be someone who offers that care and support.

Talk about it

- To the extent that you're comfortable, and without dishonoring others, describe one of your experiences with alcohol abuse — either as the drinker, or someone affected by drinking. What do you think motivated you, or the person you're thinking of, to abuse this substance? What were the results?

Day 3

Lisa Scheffler, author

So far this week we've looked at statistics that show drug and alcohol abuse is on the rise in America, then we read the Bible's warning against such abuse. For the rest of the week, we're going to consider some possible reasons why people turn to the idols of drugs and alcohol.

Alcohol has long been a part of celebrations. Archaeologists have discovered a remote, ancient site in modern-day Turkey that's older than Stonehenge. There's no evidence that people lived or farmed there, but they did discover brewing vats and images of dancing.

While the Bible consistently forbids drunkenness, alcohol appears at celebrations in the Bible as well. For example, at a wedding feast, Jesus turned water into wine when the host ran out. Wine is portrayed as a good gift of God in Proverbs, "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (3:9–10).

Celebrating with alcohol isn't new, but when researchers look at the increased use of alcohol in America, it's not social drinking that's on the rise; it's people drinking alone. That's what has them worried. The reasons people give for drinking alone are boredom, loneliness, and to

relieve stress and anxiety. According to researchers, it's this kind of drinking that tends to either reflect or grow into alcoholism.

The false gods of drugs and alcohol can provide temporary feelings of escape, but they offer no solutions to our problems. In fact, they make things worse. Life can be extraordinarily hard, but numbing our painful emotions is a temporary fix. When we learn to take our negative emotions to God in worship, we discover that he can provide the help and comfort that we are longing for.

Psalm 42 is an honest confession of raw emotion from someone going through a painful trial. Notice how he stops and counsels himself in how to deal with these overwhelming emotions.

Read

Psalm 42

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

*¹ As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.*

*² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

*³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*

*⁴ These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.*

*⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

*⁶ My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*

*⁷ Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.*

*⁸ By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.*

*⁹ I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”*

*¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”*

*¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

Ask Yourself

- How would you describe the emotions the psalmist is wrestling with? Do you ever experience those kinds of emotions? How do you respond to them?
- What question does he ask himself in response to others asking, “where is your God?” What counsel does he give himself?

Reflect

In Psalm 42 we see a range of emotions from someone living in exile who longs to return home. Although this Psalm was written in response to a specific set of historical circumstances, it’s a model for us in dealing with painful trials.

The Psalmist is expressing his feelings of grief, despair, doubt, and frustration, as he longs to return to a time of joy and praise. In a storm of intense feelings, the psalmist describes his pain in physical terms (verse 10), reminding us that emotion is felt in our bodies. He tries interrogating his own feelings. “Why are you downcast? Why are you so disturbed?” Modern science tells us why this is a wise strategy.

Our emotions are reactions to stimuli. In times of intense emotion, our brains have flooded our bodies with chemicals to prompt a response. On their own, feelings are neither positive nor negative. For example, fear is a good thing when you’re under threat and need to be on high alert. It’s our mind’s job to determine if the threat is real.

Naming the emotion and tracing its source allows us to assess our emotion. It also gives our emotions time to dissipate so we can think more clearly. Feelings move in waves, and each wave lasts about 90 seconds if you identify, label, and accept your emotion.⁶

So, like the Psalmist we should ask ourselves questions. “Why am I so upset? And what kind of upset am I? Frustrated, angry, hurt, or disappointed? Do I feel disrespected, dismissed, or abandoned? And why?” Once we work out the source of the emotion, we can find a path forward. We can begin to alter our outlook and find hope, even if the darkest of times.

How does the Psalmist do this? He preaches to himself. “Put your hope in God,” he tells himself, because he believes he will praise him in Jerusalem again. He reminds himself that God is *his* God and *his* Savior. The Psalmist trusts in a better future. Why does he have this assurance, despite those who ask, “where is your God?” Because, according to verse 6, he remembers Yahweh’s faithful, enduring love.

Of course, it could just be good poetry, but I like to think that the Psalmist repeats verse 5 because trusting God is a process. It takes effort to get on top of waves of intense feelings when they threaten to wash over us. The bigger the trial, the more reminders we may need that God is worthy of our trust because he is *our* Savior and *our* God. He is faithful to his promises, even if everyone around us is doubting his presence. Even if we’re doubting it ourselves.

When we are stressed, anxious, sad, or scared, the false gods of drugs and alcohol may call to us. They’ll promise to help us drown our sorrows in a bottle or escape them with a pill. But when the euphoria wears off, each of our problems will be right there waiting — arms crossed, foot tapping — for us to deal with them.

When we take those emotions to God, and interrogate them in light of his truth, we find hope for a better future. We find comfort and peace in the goodness of God and guidance for our lives.

Pray

Take some time to get real with God. If you reach for a drink or a pill bottle when you are lonely, stressed out, anxious, or depressed, then confess that. Ask the Spirit to remind you of his presence when those emotions come. Take them to God and find help and hope in times of need. Pray for the courage to seek help from others. Our [re:generation ministry](#) will welcome you.

Talk about it

- Discuss some strategies you use when you feel stressed, overwhelmed, frustrated, sad, or lonely. What are some healthy ways to deal with those emotions?

⁶ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-right-mindset/202004/the-90-second-rule-builds-self-control>

Day 4

Lisa Scheffler, author

This week we're considering how alcohol and drugs can become powerful idols in the lives of people. These false gods are deceivers promising fun and escape but bringing destruction. In an attempt to hide from their troubles, too many people abuse these substances when they are lonely, anxious, upset, or afraid. Yet the one true God is there, ready and waiting to offer real love, comfort, help, and strength.

Yesterday we looked at Psalm 42 and considered the importance of naming and evaluating the emotions that threaten to overwhelm us, especially if we are in the habit of getting drunk or high to avoid them. Today we'll continue to see how the Bible points us to God as our source of hope.

Read

Philippians 4:4–13 (NIV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 (NIV)

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Ask Yourself

- Based on these verses, what do you think the Apostle Paul would tell us to do when we feel anxious, sad, overwhelmed, frustrated, or afraid? How could his instruction help those who are tempted to turn to drugs or alcohol to numb those feelings?
- If drug or alcohol abuse isn't a temptation for you, do you use other unhealthy methods to cope? If so, what? How can Paul's instructions help you?

Reflect

No one who knows anything about Paul's life would call it easy. Having lived as a Pharisee, he left everything to follow Jesus, which undoubtedly meant he lost friends and family. During his ministry, he endured relational conflict with other apostles and with churches he planted. He lived under constant threat from the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders. He was put on trial, beaten, imprisoned, and shipwrecked.

When Paul wrote that he was content in all things and delighted in his weaknesses, or instructed believers to rejoice and not be anxious, he was speaking from experience. Paul knew what it was to suffer emotionally, mentally, and physically. He was no stranger to hardship and the temptation to try to escape the pain. Yet Paul also had the secret. A secret we can learn too.

Philippians 4:13 is an often-misused Bible verse because it's taken out of Philippians 4 and made to stand alone. That's too bad, because when you see it in its context, it is an incredibly powerful statement for those who are struggling and overwhelmed. You can find contentment, no matter what your circumstances, because Jesus gives you strength. You don't have to be a victim of life, hiding in a bottle or haze of smoke. You don't need pills to make it through the day. You need Jesus.

Jesus gave his life to give us hope. Not in an "I-sure-hope-this-happens" way, but a rock-solid, bet-your-life-on-it assurance. Jesus experienced suffering and pain, abandonment and betrayal. He endured all that for us, because he loves us and wants to give us peace that passes all understanding. Supernatural peace. Peace that observers will acknowledge as otherworldly. We can have that peace when we bring all our needs to him in prayer and trust him as a little child trusts a good and loving Father.

God's grace really is sufficient, no matter what's making us weak — a physical ailment, a habitual sin, a broken heart or some other hardship. When we acknowledge those weaknesses and seek power from God, he provides the help we need to endure. Worshipping the false gods of success, money, sex, or alcohol and drugs only leads to more discontentment and dissatisfaction. They are paper gods who collapse and crumble under the slightest weight. They offer no strength to get through life. Worshipping Jesus does. That's the secret.

Pray

What are you anxious about right now? What's making you feel weak? What's trying to steal your joy or causing you to doubt the goodness of your Father? Pray over those things right now. Ask the Spirit to pour out God's love and pray that you "may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18–19). Pray that Christ will strengthen you so you can find contentment in all circumstances.

Talk about it

- Discuss how believers can help one another during difficult times. How can we provide practical help and encourage greater faith and healthy ways of coping?
- Memorizing scripture is a great way to combat temptation. Having the Word of God ready and waiting in your mind can make the difference. Read through the verses we looked at today and pick out a verse to memorize, then challenge each other to learn it. Hold each other accountable.

Day 5

On Day 5 of the Engage God Daily, we spend some time digesting what we've learned during the week and inviting the Spirit to transform us.

We're going to end our week with a passage from Ephesians that gives us the ultimate alternative to getting drunk or high.

Read

Ephesians 5:15–20 (NIV)

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect

Paul speaks plainly in these verses. It's pure foolishness to allow yourself to be controlled by mind-altering substances. Yield yourself to the Holy Spirit alone.

Alcohol and drug abuse flourish in isolation. When we cut ourselves off from the life of the body, we can find the lure of false gods difficult to resist. Let's encourage one another to worship God. Let's find joy in community and join together in praising and thanking the Father in the name of the Son.

Let's review the steps we're going to be taking each week:

1. **Recognize.** Under the Spirit's guidance, we're going to identify the idols of our hearts and recognize how God meets the need we're trying to satisfy with an idol.
2. **Repent.** We're going to turn from that idol — release it and repent of it. In the words of Deuteronomy 12:3, we're going to smash our idols!
3. **Revere.** We're going to turn to God. We're going to worship God with our whole hearts and ask the Spirit to grow our faith. We're going to gratefully receive the abundance that God offers us in Christ.

Pray

Father,

I praise you for your faithfulness. I rejoice in your love.

I come seeking your grace. Help me see that it is sufficient. I put my trust in you alone, my God and my Savior. Jesus, you are the source of my strength. Spirit, fill me with life. I yield myself to you alone. Teach me to be content in all circumstances.

When I am anxious and looking for relief, draw me into worship. Remind me of the unmatched joy that comes from being in your presence. Grant me your incomprehensible peace. Teach me how to live according to your will.

Jesus, it's in your name I pray, Amen

Talk about it

- Discuss with a trusted friend or family member your biggest takeaway from this week. Ask for them to pray for you and help hold you accountable as you commit to smashing idols in your life. If you need help, our [re:generation ministry](#) will welcome you.

Coming next week

What is our next idol to smash? It's a beautiful gift from God, but one our culture tempts us to misuse. Next week, we're talking about sex.