



STAYING SOBER

God expects believers to be good stewards of the bodies He has given them.

PROVERBS 23:17-21,29-35

Alcoholism and drug abuse have become a prominent feature of our cultural landscape. Lives have been destroyed, marriages ruined, families wounded, and communities disrupted because of its destructive influence. Some of us worry that our children or grandchildren will be caught in its grip. Others of us worry that someone we love will never be set free from his or her addiction.

What factors contribute most to alcohol and drug abuse? Can someone be a social or recreational user and not be an abuser? Explain.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 22:17–24:22

Proverbs 22:17–24:22 has been called by some Bible teachers “The Thirty Wise Sayings of Solomon.” In staccato fashion, Solomon poured out precept after precept layered on top of the foundational truths he set forth in the previous chapters, especially chapters 1–9. Solomon’s inspired words are wise counsel upon which God’s people can build a sound and fruitful life.

Four things are remarkable about Solomon’s counsel in this passage. First, the wisdom of God revealed in His Word covers a wide variety of issues. Solomon left no stone unturned in giving wise instruction to God’s people about many issues of life.

Second, the wisdom of God is soul-searching. That is, Solomon’s counsel to God’s people was personal and spiritual. He was not interested in surface issues but rather matters of the heart.

Third, Solomon’s counsel is intensely practical. He was interested in making God’s wisdom livable and not just theoretical.

Fourth, Solomon’s counsel is relational in that he desired relationships with God to grow deeper and more mature and relationships with others to grow more mature and loving. Comprehensive, soul-searching, practical, and personal, Solomon was used by God to distill the wisdom of God into understandable and applicable counsel.

Read Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35, looking for the descriptors used by Solomon. How do these descriptors characterize abuse?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE PROMISE (PROV. 23:17-18)

¹⁷ Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day. ¹⁸ Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God the Father is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Deut. 32:6).

VERSE 17

Those who **fear** the Lord and trust in Him can count on a secure and hopeful future. To help God's people know and understand this promise, Solomon gave two pieces of wise counsel. First, he returned to the principle first laid down in Proverbs 1:7. It is the fear and reverent awe of the Lord that is the basis of wisdom. Rather than developing a jealousy toward the worldly wisdom of the sinful and secular, Solomon directed God's people to stay grounded in loving and fearing the Lord. The fear of God tethers us to ultimate reality and unchanging truth.

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VERSE 18

The promise of God's presence assures a future hope. This was the second great truth of which Solomon reminded God's people so they might continually embrace the wisdom of God. Solomon combined two great themes of life—hope and wisdom. Walking in God's wisdom keeps alive the promise of a future with purpose and hope; to neglect the wisdom of God will cut short or stunt a future with purpose and hope.

How is hope dashed when trusting in something other than God? How does trusting God lead to a secure and hopeful future?

THE PETITION (PROV. 23:19-21)

¹⁹ Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. ²⁰ Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, ²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

BIBLE SKILL: *Memorize a verse and apply it in a real-life situation.*

Memorize Proverbs 23:19. Reflect on how this verse can guide you in giving your body to the Lord. Write out a prayer to God. Ask Him to show you any pattern of behavior in your life that needs to be brought under His control, to strengthen you so you can be released from its grip, and He alone can have complete control over you.

VERSES 19-21

When Solomon referred to the **heart** in this verse he meant the thinking process of God's people. How and what a person thinks when it comes to the critical junctures of life makes all the difference. A sound mind filled with the wisdom of God will be better able to make the right choices and avoid the bad choices that can derail us. Solomon's wise counsel to God's people was for them to stay the course set by the wisdom of God. His instruction was for God's people to remain clear-headed.

Alcohol and substance abuse can cut short a person's potential and hope-filled future. Solomon petitioned God's people to **be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat**. Both drunkenness and gluttony can lead to poverty of body and soul. Both alcohol



and food sometimes function as medicines that numb us to the difficulties and pains of life. God's people are to trust God in difficult times, not turning to vices such as alcohol or overeating for comfort in the process. The numbing effects of drunkenness and overeating are only short-term fixes for what may be a set of long-term problems. When the effects of self-medication and gluttony are gone, the problems will remain.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GLUTTONY AND ALCOHOL

- Warnings against gluttony: Proverbs 23:1-3,20-21; 28:7
- Warnings against alcohol: Proverbs 23:29-35; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18
- The physical effects of alcohol: Job 12:25; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35
- The mental effects of alcohol: Hosea 4:11
- The spiritual effects of alcohol (deadens one's self to God): Isaiah 5:11-12
- Cases of drunkenness in the Bible: Noah (Gen. 9:21); Lot (Gen. 19:33); Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36); Uriah the Hethite (2 Sam. 11:13); Elah, king of Israel (1 Kings 16:9); Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:16)
- The alternative to drunkenness: Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
- God gave us our bodies and wants us to honor Him with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

In these verses, Solomon addressed two important yet sensitive issues. First, he addressed alcohol abuse. His counsel was simple—disassociate yourself from the abuse of alcohol. Abusing alcohol opens up the individual to all kinds of harm and causes a person to become entangled in a subculture that is often harmful, toxic, and detrimental to so many areas of life.

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Second, Solomon addressed the often-neglected issue of gluttony. A *drunkard* will keep on buying alcohol until all his money is gone. By the same token, Solomon warned that *the glutton will come to*

poverty. Shoving food into our mouths generally leaves us groggy. The **slumber** leaves us unable to be productive when we work. As a result of our lack of control, we'll end up wearing **rags.** In our culture, we tend to abhor drunkenness, but we don't usually have the same attitude about gluttony. However, God's wisdom at work in us prompts us to treat both of them in the same way. Instead of giving in to them, we handle our difficult trials by trusting the Lord to help us to get through the challenges of life.

What are the similarities between alcohol abuse and gluttony? In what ways are alcoholism and gluttony two approaches for dealing with the same issues?

The consequences of alcohol abuse and gluttony are clear and stark. The consequences are physical, mental, financial, relational, and spiritual. How many lives have been wasted by alcohol and cut short by the effects of unhealthy habits? How many families have been ripped apart? God's people need to stay sharp, focused, and fully engaged in life—living within the guidelines of God's wisdom. Alcohol and food abuse diminish this possibility. Therefore, Solomon petitioned God's people to demonstrate wisdom and accountability in these two areas of life.

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THE PORTRAIT (PROV. 23:29-32)

²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? ³⁰ Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. ³¹ Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. ³² In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.



VERSES 29-32

Solomon portrayed the abuse of alcohol in vivid terms. He described the appeal and enticements of alcohol—***it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly***—but ***in the end it bites like a serpent***. On the front end things seem good and acceptable; on the back end the ramifications of alcohol abuse are horrible. The thought of escaping from the troubles of life by indulging in self-medication only adds to the initial allure. But the temptations offered by the abuse of alcohol will not meet expectations. The consequences of alcohol abuse are many and varied: the loss of reason, abusive and belligerent behavior, and even the open demonstration of the physical signs of alcohol abuse. Alcohol over-promises and under-delivers.

What needs to be talked about are the ravaging effects of alcohol and other addictive substances on both individuals and families.

The culture in which we live today is inundated with all kinds of advertisements when it comes to the consumption of alcohol. What is missing is the downside of the alcohol industry. Those who abuse alcohol are portrayed as the people who are living the good life. What needs to be talked about are the ravaging effects of alcohol and other addictive substances on both individuals and families.

Why is drinking alcohol so enticing? How does alcohol mirror the characteristics of a deadly snake?

What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?

THE PROBLEM (PROV. 23:33-35)

³³ **Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things.** ³⁴ **You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.** ³⁵ **“They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.”**

VERSES 33-35

In these verses the description of the consequences of alcohol's use and abuse continue in vivid and stark terms. Solomon pictured the abuser of alcohol as someone who sees **strange things** (the loss of mental reasoning) and will say all kinds of abusive or **perverse things** to others. People who abuse alcohol lose their mental capacities and the ability to demonstrate self-control. In addition, Solomon pictured the drunkard as a person asleep at the helm of a ship. The drunkard is lethargic and mentally incapacitated.

Only one thing matters for a person suffering from addiction. Not even being **struck** or beaten would be of greater concern. The pressing problem has to do with getting **another drink**. That need alone would prompt someone who's drunk to wake up from the stupor brought on by the alcohol. Waking up would be difficult because the influence of alcohol would be potent. However, a person in search of another drink would work hard to get out of bed and look for another drink.

Solomon's description in these verses of alcohol's effects challenge us to give the control of our bodies to the Lord alone.

With this description, the problem of alcohol and drug abuse has been underscored for believers. Without question, the addictive behaviors and the consequences of alcohol and substance abuse can be devastating. Solomon's description in these verses of alcohol's effects challenge us to give the control of our bodies to the Lord alone.

How is Solomon's portrait of addiction seen in real life? Which image in the description makes the greatest impact? Explain.



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to fear God alone, finding their security and hope in Him.
- Believers are to associate with those pursuing a godly lifestyle.
- The initial allure of intoxicating drinks is replaced by abuse and heartache.
- Addiction leads to perpetual danger.

When you face a challenge or difficulty, to what or whom do you turn to first? What does your answer reveal about what or who you trust in life? What changes do you need to make in light of today's study?

Evaluate your relationships in terms of the degree to which each relationship helps you pursue godliness. How can you foster relationships that encourage you to pursue godliness?

As a group, discuss ways of using this passage to help a person who is addicted. How can you approach them with love and compassion? With whom can you share these insights?

Prayer Needs
