

To Drink or not to Drink (Part 3)

In Part 1 of this series, we laid the foundation by exploring what the Bible says about alcohol, the cultural and historical context of its use, and the spiritual principles that should guide our choices. We examined how various groups of people approach alcohol, the importance of emotional intelligence in our decision-making, and the call to live Spirit-filled lives rather than being led by anything else. Part 2 built upon that by exposing the societal and systemic forces that glamorize alcohol—particularly the deceptive power of advertising and the disturbing statistics around alcohol-related harm in South Africa. We also looked at practical wisdom for light and moderate drinkers, guidance for those living with alcoholics, and the serious implications of alcohol during pregnancy. Now, in **Part 3**, we turn to one of the most critical aspects of this conversation: **addiction**. This is where we confront the stronghold that alcohol—and other substances—can have over a person's life. We will define the **bondage of addiction** through both scientific insight and biblical truth. We examine **how different substances create dependence**, including alcohol's unique grip as a socially acceptable but chemically addictive drug. We will identify the **signs of alcohol dependency**, including behavioural, emotional, and physical indicators. We will explore the **risk factors**—from genetic predisposition to environmental triggers—that increase vulnerability to addiction. Today I will also revisit the **four types of drinkers** introduced earlier (social, conformity, enhancement, and coping) and highlight which are at highest risk of developing dependency. We will end off by highlighting how to identify **co-dependency**, which is a common phenomenon amongst those living with alcoholics. The goal is to offer hope, biblical encouragement, and pathways to freedom for those struggling with addiction or helping others walk through it. Remember that addiction is not just a physical issue—it is spiritual, emotional, and relational.

1. What is the bondage of addiction?

<u>Drug</u>	<u>Why it's super addictive</u>
Nicotine	Extremely fast at reaching the brain (in seconds), creates strong physical and psychological dependence.
Heroin (and other opioids)	Causes massive euphoria; withdrawal is very painful, which traps users.
Cocaine	Creates intense, short-lived highs that people chase over and over.
Alcohol	Legal and socially accepted, but chemically very addictive and causes dangerous withdrawals.
Methamphetamine (meth)	Highly stimulating, creates a powerful reward cycle that's hard to break.

If you ask neuroscientists who study brain chemistry, nicotine usually wins purely based on its grip on the brain and how hard it is to quit — but heroin and meth often cause more immediate, life-wrecking damage.

Key Characteristics of Drunkenness: (Important to define because people now call evil good)

1. Impaired Physical Coordination:

- Slurred speech, unsteady gait, loss of balance, and reduced motor skills are common signs of drunkenness.
- The person may appear clumsy, have trouble walking or standing, or struggle to perform simple tasks.

2. Altered Mental Function:

- Impaired judgment: Decision-making abilities become compromised, leading to risky or uncharacteristic behaviour.
- Decreased inhibition: People may act in ways they typically wouldn't, such as being overly emotional, aggressive, or carefree.
- Cognitive impairment: Difficulty focusing, concentrating, or thinking clearly.

3. Emotional Effects:

- People may become more talkative, hyperactive, or euphoric in the early stages of drunkenness, but this can shift to aggression, irritability, or depression as intoxication increases.

4. Physical Symptoms:

- Flushed skin, bloodshot eyes, nausea, and vomiting may also be signs of drunkenness.
- Slowed reaction time, difficulty in focusing, or even memory lapses can occur.

5. Loss of Control:

- A person experiencing drunkenness may have difficulty controlling their actions and might engage in behaviours that could be dangerous or uncharacteristic.

While the Bible doesn't use the modern word "addiction" directly, it *definitely* talks about the kinds of struggles that addiction covers — like being enslaved, controlled by sin, losing self-control, and needing deliverance. Slaves have no rights and cannot resist their master. Their will is broken. The moment someone says, "I can't help doing it," then you know that they are bound. I will start by sharing the verse and then make a powerful statement stemming from that.

John 8:34 "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'"

1 Corinthians 6:12 "'I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything."

Addiction is anything that masters you.

Romans 6:16 "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

What you obey becomes your master.

2 Peter 2:19 "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for 'people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.'"

Galatians 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Jesus came to break every chain — including addiction.

Titus 2:11–12 "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

Grace empowers self-control.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Addiction dulls your alertness and makes you a target for the enemy.

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

You are not defined by your past chains — new life is possible.

Psalms 107:13–14 "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains."

God still breaks chains today!

2. What are the signs of excessive drinking?

We have looked at signs of drunkenness but what about the act of excessive drinking itself. This is an important question especially because a lot of heavy drinking is being endorsed in society. It is also important for those leading people to know how to nip things in the bud. The data suggests that while a smaller segment of the population consumes alcohol, those who do are more likely to engage in harmful drinking patterns. Only 31% of people 15 years and above in South Africa drink alcohol. However, 59% of those who drink in South Africa are heavy drinkers. Below are signs of excessive drinking:

- **Increased Tolerance** (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, NIAAA, 2021)
 - **Needing more alcohol to achieve the same effects**
 - **In the later stages of alcohol use disorder (AUD), especially when the liver is damaged, the opposite can happen.** The liver becomes less effective at metabolizing alcohol so the person is intoxicated by small amounts of alcohol.
- **Binge Drinking Patterns** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, 2023)
 - **Defined as consuming 5+ drinks (men) or 4+ drinks (women) in two hours**
- **Frequent Blackouts or Memory Impairment** (White, 2003)
 - **Evidence of alcohol-induced cognitive impairment**
- **Drinking Despite Negative Consequences** (American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5, 2013)
 - **Legal, financial, social, or health problems due to drinking**
- **Neglect of Responsibilities** (World Health Organization, WHO, 2018)

- **Missing work, school, or social obligations due to alcohol use**

3. Alcohol Use Dependency

A) What are the signs of Alcohol Use Dependency - AUD?

- **Loss of Control Over Drinking**
 - **Inability to stop or control alcohol consumption despite attempts**
- **Withdrawal Symptoms** (American Society of Addiction Medicine, ASAM, 2020)
 - **Physical (shaking, sweating, nausea) and psychological (anxiety, depression) symptoms when not drinking**
- **Preoccupation with Alcohol**
 - **Constant thoughts about drinking, planning around alcohol consumption**
- **Increased Drinking to Cope with Stress**
 - **Using alcohol as a primary way to manage emotions**
- **Social Isolation & Relationship Struggles**
 - **Avoiding social interactions that do not involve alcohol**
- **Continued Drinking Despite Awareness of Harm**
 - **Knowing the physical, mental, or social damage but unable to stop**

B) What are some Risk Factors and Causes of Alcohol Dependency

- **Genetic Predisposition** (Heath et al., 1997)
 - **Hereditary factors contributing to alcohol addiction**
- **Psychological Factors** (Kushner et al., 2000)
 - **Anxiety, depression, trauma as drivers of excessive drinking**
- **Environmental and Social Influences** (Babor et al., 2010)
 - **Peer pressure, family drinking culture, stress levels**

4. What are the four driving forces behind drinking?

The four types of drinkers I mentioned last week — social drinkers, conformity drinkers, enhancement drinkers, and coping drinkers — represent different motivations and reasons for drinking alcohol. Each type reflects a different approach to alcohol consumption, ranging from casual socializing to using alcohol as a way of dealing with personal struggles. Let's unpack each type in detail:

1. Social Drinker

- **Motivation: Social interaction**
- **Key Characteristics:**

- **Social drinkers enjoy alcohol primarily in social settings, such as parties, gatherings, and events.**
- **Social drinkers typically drink in moderation and are not inclined to drink alone or excessively.**
- **Drinking is seen as a way to enhance social experiences and build connections, rather than as an end in itself.**
- **Examples of Situations:**
 - Attending a wedding, family reunion, or work event where alcohol is served as part of the celebration.
 - Drinking occasionally, such as at happy hours or celebratory events like birthdays.
- **Impact:**
 - This type of drinking generally does not necessarily lead to alcohol dependence since it is typically occasional and tied to specific situations.
 - Social drinkers tend to have a healthy relationship with alcohol, as they drink responsibly and often in moderation.
 - Social drinkers need to be careful especially if they are very extraverted and attend many social gatherings in their personal lives or at work. I have had conversations with people who got into heavy drinking as they entertained stakeholders at work. There was always a function.

2. Conformity Drinker

- **Motivation: To fit in or meet social expectations**
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - **Conformity drinkers are influenced by social pressure or the desire to be accepted by a group.**
 - **Their motivation for drinking is not necessarily personal enjoyment but the desire to meet societal or peer expectations.**
 - **These individuals may not necessarily enjoy drinking but do so because it is the norm in their social circle.**
 - **They may drink to avoid being seen as different, feeling pressured to join in when others are drinking, even if they might not have an internal desire to drink.**
- **Examples of Situations:**
 - Teens or young adults in college who drink because everyone else does, or office workers who participate in happy hour even if they don't particularly like alcohol.
 - A person might drink at a party because they don't want to be seen as the only one who is not drinking.

- **Impact:**
 - Conformity drinking is often linked to peer influence and may increase the risk of problem drinking over time if the individual becomes dependent on social approval.
 - People in this category may not develop alcohol use disorder immediately, but regular conformity drinking can lead to risky drinking behaviours and a reliance on alcohol for social acceptance.

3. Enhancement Drinker

- **Motivation: To enhance positive feelings or experiences**
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - Enhancement drinkers consume alcohol because they associate it with pleasure, fun, or a boost to positive emotions.
 - This type of drinking is often about enhancing good times — whether it's celebrating an accomplishment, creating a festive mood, or simply enjoying the experience of drinking.
 - Drinking may be used to heighten emotional experiences and help individuals feel more relaxed, confident, or joyful.
 - Unlike the conformity drinker, who drinks to fit in, the enhancement drinker enjoys drinking for the sake of enjoyment.
- **Examples of Situations:**
 - Having a drink with friends at a party, or having a glass of wine during a romantic dinner to elevate the enjoyment.
 - Drinking at a sports event or celebration to enhance the mood and create a more enjoyable environment.
- **Impact:**
 - While generally moderate, enhancement drinking can potentially lead to overconsumption if it becomes tied to a habitual need to feel good.
 - If drinking becomes the primary means of experiencing positive emotions, they could develop a dependency over time.

4. Coping Drinker

- **Motivation: To deal with negative emotions, stress, or pain**
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - Coping drinkers use alcohol to escape, numb emotional pain, or cope with stress, anxiety, depression, or life challenges.
 - They may turn to alcohol to manage difficult emotions or situations, using it as a self-medication tool.

- **Drinking is often not about enjoyment but a way to distract or soothe themselves, temporarily alleviating feelings of stress, loneliness, or sadness.**
- **Coping drinkers might struggle with regular overuse of alcohol, and over time, this can lead to increased tolerance, dependency, and addiction.**
- **Examples of Situations:**
 - Drinking after a stressful day at work to unwind or calm down.
 - Turning to alcohol during emotional difficulties, such as after the loss of a loved one or during relationship problems.
 - Using alcohol to mask anxiety or loneliness, such as drinking alone at home to avoid dealing with difficult emotions.
- **Impact:**
 - Coping drinking is often a risk factor for developing alcohol use disorder (AUD) because it is rooted in emotional regulation issues.
 - This type of drinking can be problematic if it becomes the primary coping mechanism, leading to increased consumption and alcohol dependence.

Summary of the Four Types of Drinkers:

Type of Drinker	Motivation	Drinking Behaviour	Risk of AUD
Social Drinker	Enjoyment of social interaction	Occasional drinking in social settings	Low risk if drinking is moderate
Conformity Drinker	Pressure to fit in or meet social norms	Drinks to meet expectations, not for enjoyment	Moderate risk if dependence on social approval increases
Enhancement Drinker	To enhance positive experiences or emotions	Drinks to heighten enjoyment or mood	Low to moderate risk if used responsibly
Coping Drinker	To cope with negative emotions or stress	Drinks to manage emotional pain or stress	High risk of developing AUD due to reliance on alcohol for coping

The motivations behind why people drink vary significantly, and understanding these different types of drinkers can help in addressing problematic drinking behaviours. While social and enhancement drinkers might have a healthier relationship with alcohol, conformity and coping drinkers are more at risk for developing alcohol use disorder (AUD), especially if drinking becomes habitual or linked to emotional distress.

5. Abstinence in the Bible

There were a lot of people who were respected and admired who did not drink. It was not seen as weird but a choice to be consecrated. There is no shame about it.

Daniel 1:8 – "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

Luke 1:15 – (Speaking of John the Baptist) "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born."

Leviticus 10:9 – "You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come."

Numbers 6:3 – "They must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink. They must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins." (For Nazirites)

Judges 13:4 – "Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean." (Angel's instruction to Samson's mother)

6. What are some practical tips to give light or moderate drinkers?

1. Set Clear Limits

- **Pre-plan Your Intake:** Decide in advance what you will drink and how many drinks you'll have in a given space of time, and stick to that limit. It is good if someone else who is with you knows.
- **Track Your Consumption:** Keep a journal or use an app to track how much you're drinking. This can help you stay mindful of your consumption. Many people drink too much and don't actually know how much it was.

2. Pace Yourself

- **Alternate Drinks:** For every alcoholic drink, have a non-alcoholic beverage (like water or soda). This helps slow down your drinking pace and keeps you hydrated.
- **Eat Before and During Drinking:** Having food with alcohol can slow its absorption, helping you maintain a more moderate level of intoxication.

3. Choose Lower-Alcohol Drinks

- **Opt for Drinks with Less Alcohol Content:** Choosing beverages with lower alcohol content (like light beer or diluted cocktails) can help reduce the total amount of alcohol consumed.

4. Avoid Drinking Games or Peer Pressure

- **Say No to Drinking Games:** Avoid engaging in games or situations where there's pressure to drink more than you're comfortable with.
- **Be Confident in Your Limits:** If you're in a social situation where others are drinking heavily, be assertive about sticking to your own drinking limits. Remember the scriptures about not associating with drunkards. Jesus said if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

5. Establish Alcohol-Free Days

- **Designate Alcohol-Free Days:** Set specific days of the week where you do not consume any alcohol, giving your body time to recover and reducing habitual drinking.

6. Mind Your Triggers

- **Identify Triggers:** Be aware of situations or emotions that might lead you to overindulge in alcohol. Stress, social situations, or boredom can be triggers for some.
- **Avoid Stress-Induced Drinking:** Find alternative ways to cope with stress, such as exercise, relaxation techniques, or hobbies.

7. Stay Active

- **Engage in Physical Activities:** Regular exercise can improve your overall well-being and reduce the likelihood of drinking excessively due to stress or boredom.
- **Incorporate Social Activities that Don't Revolve Around Drinking:** Try to spend time with friends in environments where alcohol isn't the focal point, like hiking, playing sports, or attending cultural events.

8. Seek Support if Needed

- **Join a Support Group:** If you're finding it difficult to moderate your drinking, consider joining a group like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or seeking professional counselling. We often recommend **Dr Elca Erlank who is a PHD Social worker based in Pretoria East**. She is also a believer. Some of the centres you can send people to are: **1. Castle Carey in Pretoria North 2. Elim in Kempton Park 3. Beethoven in Hartebeespoort. 4. Evexia – a day clinic (psychiatric). It's in Menlyn and Midstream.**
- **Remember that treatment centres have different measures they use to rate their success.** Some are abstinence based whilst others focus on reduction or on the person not using their drug of choice. This means that sometimes some centers will claim to have very high success rates yet this is not based on abstinence but perhaps the patient has switched from using a heavy drug to something else. It's a known fact that often when people are interviewed or called after leaving a centre and asked about their habit, they will tend to lie they will say they are fine when they're not.
- **Talk to Loved Ones:** Share your goal of abstinence or moderation with friends or family members who can help you stay accountable and provide support when necessary.

These strategies can help individuals who drink to do so more responsibly and maintain control over their alcohol consumption. This may also help you as a guideline if you are trying to reduce your alcohol consumption.

7. Understanding Co-dependency

Co-dependency, in relation to alcohol, is a dysfunctional relationship pattern where a non-addicted partner or family member enables or supports the alcoholic's behaviour—often by prioritizing the alcoholic's needs over their own, tolerating harmful behaviours, or attempting to control the addiction—while neglecting their own well-being.

Signs of co-dependency

- A. **Routine sacrifice**
- B. **Feeling responsible for the other** (e.g. Making excuses for addictive behaviour).
- C. **Feeling the relationship is all they have in their life** (e.g. Unhealthy attachment and self-worth issues).
- D. **Denial about behaviour of both parties in the relationship.** (The addict's behavior and the codependent's behaviour).
- E. **Depression, guilt and shame**
- F. **Strong rescuer tendencies** (Sometimes Co-dependents will get into relationships with people they can rescue. This need to rescue often enables the behavior and blocks treatment). The codependent thinks they are being kind and compassionate to the addict but in actual fact they're primarily getting their own needs met.

Conclusion

We are not called to conform but to transform. In a world that glamorizes what destroys, we must shine as beacons of truth and freedom. The alcohol industry may have billions, but we carry something far more powerful — the truth of God's Word and the light of His Kingdom. Let us be the salt that preserves, the light that exposes, and the voices that lovingly but boldly confront a culture that numbs pain instead of healing it. May we walk in wisdom, live in freedom, and lead others to the One who breaks every chain.