

Binge Drinking: The Annual Rite of Spring

The scene is fairly common in pubs and taverns across America. March 17 has turned into one of the most alcohol-fueled days of the year, but pales in comparison with the weeklong rite of passage known as Spring Break.

When colleges and universities across the country give students a week off in March, many head off on booze cruises or to beach cities in search of outstanding parties and cheap beer. Close to 80,000 students are expected to show up in Cancun where the focus is on drinking to the point of collapse.

According to the Journal of American College Health, during Spring Break, the average male reported drinking 18 drinks per day and the average woman reported 10 drinks per day. More than half of all men and more than 40 percent of all women drank until they became sick or passed out at least once.

St. Patrick's Day and Spring Break can be blamed for some of the booziest blow-outs, but binge drinking is a growing problem across the United States all through the year, especially among the young. It's linked to 1,400 college student deaths annually, according to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston and the CDC.

Statistics also show that the average American adult goes on a booze binge about 7.5 times a year. About one in three people who drink alcohol report at least one episode of binge drinking in the prior month.

A binge occurs when a male consumes five or more drinks or a female consumes four or more drinks in a short period of time. Most bingers do not drink heavily on a consistent basis. It's just that when they do drink, they overdo it.

So What?

As someone who is exploring what it means to live the Christian life, you may wonder why it matters if you get drunk once in a while. Or, you may already know Jesus as the Lord of your life, but continue to struggle with this issue. Maybe you are a parent and see this pattern in your kids.

“Some [people] who are not abusive drinkers and party too much on just one occasion can get alcohol poisoning and die,” says Dr. Peter M. Monti, director of the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies at Brown University in Providence, R.I.

In addition to the obvious medical consequences, binge drinking is a dangerous pattern that can lead to full-fledged addiction. Even if it doesn't, the “morning after” will often bring regret and shame.

“I didn't think drinking was so bad until it put a wedge between me and God,” says Stacy Finnerty, a college sophomore. “I'm not sure that the Bible prohibits alcohol entirely, but I do know that guilt and hangovers kept me out of church. It just doesn't seem to be God's best.”

What Does God Say?

Billy Graham often addresses questions about drinking in his “My Answer” columns and his responses contain great wisdom:

“God does not want you to be destroyed by alcohol. Instead, God loves you, and He wants you to be free—free of alcohol's deadly grip, and free to live for Christ. Jesus promised, ‘If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). Your life may have been filled with broken promises—but Christ never breaks His promises to us.

“That is why I urge you to turn your life over to Christ. When He comes into our lives, He not only forgives the past, but He also gives us hope for the future. As I often say, it is far better to face our problems with Christ than to face them alone.”

Mr. Graham points out that alcohol abuse “destroys the health and well-being of countless individuals and causes untold grief among families and friends. The words of the Bible have been proved time and time again: ‘Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise’ (Proverbs 20:1).

“But you know this through bitter experience, I suspect. And yet your problem is that you seem to be powerless to do anything about it. Does that mean there is no hope? No! There is hope—hope in Christ. The Bible says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’ (Acts 10:43). That is a wonderful truth and you can know it in your life if you have truly repented and turned to Christ.

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