

Is Biblical Sobriety the Next Big Health Trend?

Should Christians abstain from alcohol? The answer depends on which Christian you ask. Some denominations take no stance on the issue, allowing believers to make the decision for themselves. On one hand, Jesus' first miracle was to turn water into wine, indicating that He was in favor of keeping the liquor flowing. On the other hand, in Ephesians 5:18 we read, "do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." So, denominations like the Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Nazarenes and the Salvation Army believe Christians should abstain from alcohol. The Bible does seem to be clear that we should avoid a lifestyle of drunkenness.

Across secular America, there's an emerging counter-culture embracing the sober lifestyle for its health benefits. We wanted to explore this trend.

People Are Drinking Less, Especially Millennials

As cultures have shifted to place a higher value on health, there's been a global decrease in the total number of drinkers since 2000. The World Health Organization says that the number of people who drink has declined from 47.6% down to 43%, with the biggest culture changes emerging in Europe, particularly Russia and Eastern Europe.

Men were advised to reduce their consumption down to only one drink per day.

Millennials, in particular, have a waning interest in consuming alcohol. Although Millennial consumers aren't sprinting away from alcohol as they did with tobacco, they are choosing to drink somewhat less. This is due in part to their general aversion to wasting money on consumables; Millennials

are still shell shocked by the great recession and prefer to spend money differently than older generations.

Additionally, young people may be moving towards consuming less alcohol because they're increasing their consumption of marijuana, as the drug has become increasingly easier to access legally in the United States.

Sobriety in the Public Dialogue

Choosing sobriety, especially if you've struggled with addiction, may feel like you're always missing out on a party. Alcohol shows up when people want to celebrate, relax, dine out and even mourn. Support systems are key for helping people who like alcohol, but know that it's bad for them. They need others around them acknowledging, "yeah, this can be really really hard. I'm wrestling with it too."

Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous offer powerful communities to support those pursuing sobriety. We also love Celebrate Recovery, a 12-step program born out Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, with meetings at churches nationwide. However, the AA and/or Celebrate Recovery communities may not be the right support outlet for people who are simply interested in drinking less, but who are not alcoholics. Alternatively, people who identify as alcoholics may want auxiliary support outside of their 12-step meetings to help them in their recovery.

Today, there are many wonderful thought leaders who discuss sober living on podcasts, books and in online communities. Here are a few of our favorites:

- Russell Brand: Brand has been extremely vocal about his sobriety and even published a book called *Recovery: Freedom From Our Addictions* in 2017. The book explores Alcoholics Anonymous' philosophies, but reframes the 12 steps in a more modern and humorous tone.
- Dax Shepard: Actor Dax Shepard has been sober since

2004. He hosts the weekly hit podcast “Armchair Expert,” and the topic of abstaining from alcohol comes up often on the show.

- Anne Lamott: Lamott is a beloved Christian author who speaks frequently about her sobriety. Her *New York Times*’ bestseller *Help Thanks Wow* offers modern prayers through a very authentic lens.
- Nadia Bolz-Weber: Bolz-Weber rose to prominence as an edgy and counter-cultural Lutheran minister. She’s been sober since 1996 and speaks frequently about abstaining from alcohol. Check out the *New York Times*’ bestseller *Pastrix* for a great introduction to her work.
- The Seltzer Squad: There are ample great podcasts which discuss the topic of sobriety, but we particularly love The Seltzer Squad.

The Health Benefits of Drinking Less

Alcohol consumption increases your likelihood of cardiovascular problems, cancer, stroke and many other health issues.

Historically, the CDC has promoted healthy moderate drinking recommendations for men to consume no more than two drinks daily and for women to consume no more than one drink daily. However, a very robust study published in *The Lancet* in 2018 recommended even lower alcohol consumption. Notably, men were advised to reduce their consumption down to only one drink per day.

Drinking more than seven drinks a week begins to erode health. If you drink an average of two glasses a day, statistically, you’re cutting your life short by six months. At 3.5 drinks a day, you’ve shaved five years off your life.

The Seventh Day Adventists have been studied for their remarkably long lifespans. This Christian denomination believes that they should treat their body as a temple,

abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and meat consumption. The more you drink, less your body is being honored as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

While the Bible doesn't specifically command believers that we need to abstain from alcohol, it certainly seems that God wants us to avoid drunkenness for both spiritual and health reasons. We think that as our culture shifts towards drinking less and celebrating people who chose sober lifestyles, we'll all be healthier as a result. {eoa}

LightWorkers