

who can help encourage you and celebrate your victories with you.

- **Pray.** St. Alphonsus Ligouri says, "Chastity is a virtue... Whoever prays for it will certainly attain it." If you don't pray regularly, begin to do so. Even ten minutes a day will allow the grace of Jesus to enter your life in new ways. When you pray, pray for the gift and the virtue of chastity, and listen to how Jesus might be guiding you to take steps to grow in exercising the virtue in your own life.



Chapter IV

Alcohol

CHAPTER 4

ALCOHOL

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Temperance

Leader's Guide:

The temptation to abuse alcohol is a common one on the college campus. For many young people, their college experience is, in some ways, defined by alcohol: the parties they attended, the social circles they associated with and the "freedom" they experienced. However, similar to the last chapter's discussion on sex, the freedom and excitement that the culture often promises through the use of alcohol is often not an experience that leads us to living fully alive. Instead, the abuse of alcohol often leads to emptiness and hopelessness.

In response to the various dangers of alcohol, some groups use scare tactics about the dangers of binge drinking and alcoholism to encourage moderation through fear. Others take a sort of Puritan approach, which views consuming any alcohol as sinful or hedonistic.

However, the Catholic understanding of alcohol strives for a healthy middle ground between these two views. On the one hand, we strive for the virtue of temperance, which helps us moderate our desires in a healthy way; on the other hand, we view alcohol as a gift from God that can foster joy and cultivate relationships, when used correctly.

When it comes to alcohol, motivations matter. As we have discussed frequently throughout this study, our human motivations can cause us to seek happiness and worth in people or in things that can never fulfill us; this is often the case with those who use alcohol in an unhealthy way. But the Lord doesn't want us to live as slaves to a created substance; he wants us to be fully alive and to experience the joy that created things have to offer, but always in a way that reflects and points back to him.

For more on this topic and some of the other themes in this study, reference the "Christlike Leadership for Men" or "Christlike Leadership for Women" Bible studies on FOCUS Equip. In addition, you can reference the "Cultural Apologetics" series on FOCUS Equip for a discussion of Catholicism and alcohol.

Introduction: Identity and Alcohol

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

In the last few chapters of our study, we've been learning that man is made in God's image and likeness, and that through that image, we are made for relationship. We've also discussed the beauty of the natural order of creation and how that can help us orient our lives to living fully alive.

In our chapter on relationships and original justice, we discussed the importance of an ordered relationship with *creation* or *nature*. This includes the natural world around us, as well as the created things of this world. In this chapter, we are going to discuss how we can approach a rightly-ordered view of alcohol, which is a created substance. If you've never heard it before, the Church has a moderate approach to this topic that you might find refreshing! Let's dive in!

1. How does the culture tell us that alcohol will lead us to being fully alive?

Response: The lie being told to us by the culture is that fun or freedom can't be accomplished without alcohol, or even excessive alcohol use, and by drinking, you can have a better time with friends (or strangers).

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

There is plenty of information in the media and the culture that shapes our understanding of alcohol. There is the mainstream cultural view that we just discussed; in response to the various dangers of alcohol, some groups take an opposite approach and use scare tactics about the dangers of binge drinking and alcoholism to encourage moderation through fear. Others take a sort of Puritan approach, which views consuming any alcohol as sinful or hedonistic. But what is an ordered, Christian outlook on the topic of alcohol?

The Catholic understanding of alcohol strives for a healthy middle ground between these two extremes. The Church calls us to the virtue of temperance, which helps us moderate our desires in a healthy way; Scripture also points out how we can view alcohol as a gift from God that can foster joy and cultivate relationships!

2. What has been your personal experience with alcohol? What have been some of the effects of alcohol on your life, your time or your relationships, family, and friends? Take a moment to reflect on this before answering.

Response: Let the group discuss. Be intentional in creating space for participants to share a variety of experiences if they desire, whether it be no involvement with alcohol or over-consumption of it. Be watchful

for the sensitivities that may be present for certain members of your group, and feel free to model appropriate or prudent sharing.

3. Let's again consider the same four motivations from the previous three chapters: approval, comfort, control and power. How might these motivations affect how we or those around us use or abuse alcohol? Consider, what is *your* motivation? Take a few moments to reflect on this.

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *"If I drink with this certain group, I can finally get their acceptance," or "I'm willing to break the law to get this group's approval."*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *"Getting drunk helps me to numb the pain, get rid of stress or escape the problems in my life."*

Security and Control: *"Drinking with this crowd ensures that I won't spend my Friday night alone," or "Getting in with this crowd will give me a group of friends I can relate to."*

Influence and Power: *"Drinking with this crowd will make me more popular," or "I need to drink with this crowd for them to respect me."*

God's Vision for Alcohol

Let's look first at how Scripture and the Church can help us understand temperance.

(Read Sirach 31:25-31.)

The CCC defines temperance as "the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created

goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable" (CCC 1805). Further, CCC 2290 says, "The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess."

4. How might this definition of temperance and what we read in Sirach apply to use of alcohol? What do you think the "honorable limits" of using alcohol might be?

Response: Alcohol is a created good and can be dangerous to ourselves and to others when consumed in excess. Alcohol itself is morally neutral, neither a good nor an evil. What matters is how we use it. Honorable limits your group might discuss could include: not drinking underage, limiting oneself to one or two drinks over the course of an evening/event, never driving while intoxicated, etc.

5. This definition describes that overdoing it on created goods can impair "the will's mastery over instincts." What might be some consequences of this? Look back at Sirach to help.

Response: Possible answers include: an impaired understanding of right and wrong, opening the door to sin; impaired decision-making, especially of the effects of our actions on others; falling prone to choosing what we personally want or need, regardless of whether or not it is good for us, etc.

6. As St. Ambrose puts it, "For the things we avoid when sober, we unknowingly commit through drunkenness." St. Thomas Aquinas adds that drunkenness is sinful because "man willingly and knowingly deprives himself of the use of reason, whereby he performs virtuous deeds and avoids sin." When man loses his will and his reason, he actually loses his ability to recognize and choose the good, which are part of what it means to be

made in God's image and likeness. Throwing away our reason, even for a night, rejects this identity and separates us from God. How does this change or add to your understanding of the sin of drunkenness?

Response: Let the group discuss.

7. On the other end of the spectrum, Scripture describes alcohol as a gift from God to his people. As the Psalms tell us, God makes "wine to gladden their hearts" (Psalm 104:15)! Alcohol is often present at celebrations and social gatherings and can foster joy and friendship. How can we utilize alcohol for these purposes for which God meant it, while ensuring that we are not falling into a near occasion of sin for ourselves or for those around us?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: moderately consuming alcohol at celebrations, on feast days, etc.; learning about different types of alcohol and how to enjoy them appropriately, such as wine tasting; learning to pair alcohol with a meal and discussing how they complement one another, etc. Thomas Aquinas famously stated: "Drink to the point of hilarity!", and 20th century writer Hilaire Belloc famously once said: "[w]herever the Catholic sun doth shine, / There's always laughter and good red wine."

The Church's Invitation

Our relationship with alcohol can be guided by the Church's wisdom and by our own personal experience, but those are not the only guiding factors. We must also take into account the national and local laws on this topic. Scripture can help us understand how to approach our country's laws regarding alcohol.

(Read Romans 13:1 – 2.)

8. *What does this passage reveal to us about government authority?*

Response: Paul is calling every Christian to follow the law of the land (so long as the law is just). While many students can understand the reasons not to get drunk, it is harder to understand why someone cannot drink under the age of 21, especially if they know how to handle alcohol. The invitation to follow the law of the land and avoid underage drinking can be seen by college students as a radical call, but it is one that provides an incredible witness of the Christian life on campus.

9. *How does this apply to our drinking age in our nation?*

Response: Let the group discuss. For more information, consider reading CCC2242 or the “Christlike Leadership” chapter on Sobriety. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984 made it illegal for those under 21 to purchase or publicly possess alcohol. Every state has its own specific laws on the consumption of alcohol by minors. For example, some states do not allow it in any circumstance; others allow it in private at the home of a parent/guardian with their consent. For state-by-state laws, feel free to check out: <https://alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/underage-drinking/state-profiles>.

10. *What kind of witness might it be to others on your campus or in your house to live out Romans 13 or of the Church’s vision for the temperate use of alcohol? What effects might that witness have on those around you?*

Response: Let the group discuss.

Alcohol and Temperance: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

Greek life gave me the instant community I desired when I first got to college. I didn’t care if throwing wild parties, chasing women or doing drugs wasn’t moral or virtuous. All I cared about was having fun and having a group of friends to share the memories with. Several years of blacking out, waking up next to strangers, and feeling depressed left me devoid of life and a ghost of the man I had always hoped to be. I slowly started creeping into the back of the chapel during Mass – arriving five minutes late to avoid being seen. One day, I encountered a priest who radiated Christ’s love and joy for life itself. This priest chased me down after Mass and brought me to a FOCUS Missionary who changed my life. Through my friendship with this missionary, I learned that drinking alcohol didn’t have to end with regretting decisions from the previous night, but that I could have great conversations and make the real connections that I longed for. God longs for us to live life abundantly and to throw off the chains of slavery. Let God into your life and begin growing in virtue. You will not be disappointed!

Female Testimony:

When I started my freshman year of college, I knew I wanted to join a sorority. I wanted to “fit in,” and I was willing to do just about anything to make sure I did. I quickly realized fitting in meant going out and drinking with my sisters basically every

weekend. I came to realize after a semester living that life, the “fitting in” I was seeking never left me fully satisfied. I found myself constantly searching for more, thinking that alcohol and partying was the answer; but it was never enough. That same year, God so lovingly put someone in my life who gave me the option to choose something more. The women in my sorority who were running after Jesus and a life of virtue were so patient with me as I dug my way out of the party scene, and they helped lead me into the arms of the One whom I had been seeking. He was waiting to fill me with his merciful and endless love that drinking and partying could never offer.

11. What is one action you can commit to this week to grow in temperance or moderation towards alcohol?

Response: Let the group discuss. Invite your students to make a written commitment that you can follow up with next week!



Chapter V

Success
