

WHICH ONE



**IS THE
ALCOHOLIC?**



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

**Alcoholism can kill the alcoholic,
but it's their behaviour that does all the other damage.**

What Does an Alcoholic Look Like?

How can we distinguish a “social drinker” from an “alcoholic”? Typically people used to think that an alcoholic was a skid row bum, dressed in an old, tattered overcoat. Normally, a man was pictured – never a woman or a teenager, and he was sitting under a bridge somewhere, was usually over the age of 60 and was clutching a brown paper sack with a bottle of booze sticking out of it.

Strangely enough, a small percentage of alcoholics actually live on skid row. The rest are businessmen and women, housewives, doctors, lawyers, pastors, airline pilots, university students, teenagers and so on. Alcoholism is no respecter of persons!

The Disease of Alcoholism

Alcoholism has been defined as a “disease of body, mind, emotion and soul”. No longer is alcoholism considered entirely a moral failing. It is diagnosed and treated as an addiction, a disease with physical symptoms and perhaps, physical roots. This disease is progressive in nature, always getting worse, never better, unless arrested.

An alcoholic is a person whose drinking is causing continual problems in any area of his/her life, and yet they continue to drink! These problems could be in relation to the person's marriage, family relationships, job performance, state of health, etc.

A “practicing” alcoholic will unknowingly cross an “invisible line” into addiction. No longer will he/she drink to get “high” or experience euphoria, but to just take the edge off of life and to feel “normal”. Drinking is no longer a social pastime, but an allergy of the body coupled with an obsession of the mind. It becomes larger than life and torments and destroys its victims. The alcoholic has lost his/her choice about drinking. They will hang on to the bottle for dear life in total delusion, thinking that their problems are due to other people, places or things. They must protect that bottle at all costs as long as it soothes the pain of living! Then, in the later stages of alcoholism, great care is even taken to hide the bottles.

No alcoholic ever dreamed he/she would end up a slave to the substance that at one time erased their emotional pain, caused them to feel accepted and helped them to overcome a lack of self-worth. At one time the bottle had been considered their best, most dependable friend. Then without warning, it turned upon them, leaving nothing but illogical cravings and destruction in its wake. The “best friend” has been revealed to be their worst enemy, the very source of most of their troubles.

Alcoholics may have quit drinking time and time again, only to return or “relapse”. They may have gone “on the wagon”, promising loved ones, with all sincerity, that the drinking will cease. When these well-meaning promises are broken, those around them are alienated one more time. Other times, an alcoholic may make a commitment to just cut down on the drinking, only to “taper on” again and then often end up worse than before! It's not stopping drinking that's difficult for the alcoholic, it's STAYING stopped that's hard! Alcoholics may change their diet, try to exercise more, read self-improvement books, listen to recordings, attend lectures, devour the Bible and pray a lot. Though these are obviously positive steps, they usually do not remedy alcoholism. Repeated “lone ranger” attempts to gain control over the substance of alcohol nearly always prove to be unsuccessful, thus heaping one failure upon another.

Alcoholics are known to die prematurely. Doctors have known for years that alcoholic men who do not give up the bottle have a higher death rate than average. The rates are even more dramatic among men under the age of 45 in relation to their sober counterparts.

One of AA's pamphlets defines alcoholism as follows: “Whether or not you are an alcoholic is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you've been drinking, ...or even how much you drink. The true test is the answer to this question: what has alcohol done to you? If it has affected your relationships; if it has influenced the way you schedule your day; if it has affected your health, ...if you are in any way preoccupied with alcohol – then the likelihood is that you have a problem.”

Family Disease

Alcoholism is also a family disease. It is believed that the disease can be passed from one generation to another via the genes and the dynamics that exist within families. Children of alcoholics are more prone to alcoholism than the rest of the population. There is an apparent biological link to alcoholism so if you have a blood relative who is an alcoholic, then you're at high risk and therefore any drinking you do needs to be watched.

Alcoholism and the Elderly

Those in their "sunset" years have increasing factors that place them at a higher risk of alcoholism. Aging and retirement can set the stage, along with depression, failing health, loss of a spouse or merely diminished self-esteem. In addition, an older person's bodily functions slow down with age, so the same amount of any drug (including alcohol) can have a greater effect and last longer. Sadly, alcoholism among the elderly is on the rise!

Families Get Sick Too

The alcoholism of one family member causes others in the family a significant amount of pain, often leaving them unable to cope or deal effectively with it. Family members frequently fall into self-destructive patterns without even knowing it. They can easily become "codependent", meaning that their life is affected by the alcoholic person's behaviour, so they seek ways to control or change that person. This results in another set of problems for which help needs to be sought.

An interesting situation that can arise in the family of an alcoholic is the reaction of the codependent to the addict when he/she stops drinking. Personalities can change drastically and the recovering alcoholic, who now realizes how much of life they've missed, is attempting to make up for lost time. They're spending their evenings with support group meetings, enjoying their new life in recovery and suddenly becoming the family "hero". When the alcoholic finally gets sober, the spouse or loved one sometimes resists the change, actually preferring them in his/her former state, and may attempt to sabotage the recovery. The codependent may have felt more "in control" when the alcoholic was drinking.

Alcoholism in the Church?

Studies have shown that approximately one out of ten people who drink run the risk of becoming an alcoholic and it has been shown that one is particularly at risk if it runs in their family. Now additional studies show the possibility that one out of three Christians who drink will become alcoholic! This increase in ratio is due to the extra load of guilt and shame attached to the Christian lifestyle and behaviour.

Many in our church congregations will be directly affected by alcoholism, either by having the disease themselves or by living in the family of an alcoholic. Until recent years, many churches refused to acknowledge these problems within their congregations. Instead of being the "healing community" that Christ has called us to be, the church was "shooting its wounded".

Because of the church's negative attitudes regarding alcoholism, Christians usually take great precautions to hide it better than the average person, thus keeping themselves isolated and imprisoned within their misery much longer than others. Family members of the alcoholic, who are also Christians, will devise methods to successfully cover it up, thus helping to keep the whole family sick.

Many Christians still see alcoholism as just a "sin". Yes, it may have originated from past sinful behaviour, or may even be the end result of an unsuspecting predisposed person making the decision to take that first drink. However, once the alcoholic has been consumed by addiction and has lost the power of choice, they truly are SICK – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The question can be asked: isn't labeling alcoholism as a "disease" a cop out? Doesn't it save the alcoholic from having to take responsibility for his/her drinking behavior? Actually it appears to have the opposite effect. The disease concept has been a very effective way to help alcoholics get the treatment they so desperately need. All aspects of alcoholism, both the sin and the sickness, need to be addressed in order to fully recover. God forgives us of our sins and heals us of our diseases! (see Psalm 103:3)

The Bible's Description of Alcoholism

Who has anguish? Who has sorrow?

Who is always fighting? Who is always complaining?

Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?

*It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns,
trying out new drinks.*

*Don't gaze at the wine, seeing how red it is,
how it sparkles in the cup, how smoothly it goes down.*

*For in the end it bites like a poisonous snake;
it stings like a viper.*

*You will see hallucinations,
and you will say crazy things.*

*You will stagger like a sailor tossed at sea,
clinging to a swaying mast.*

*And you will say, "They hit me, but I didn't feel it.
I didn't even know it when they beat me up.*

*When will I wake up
so I can look for another drink?"* *Proverbs 23:29-35 (NLT)*

Is There Any Hope?

Alcoholics who STAY off the bottle – even after many years of hard drinking – can live as long as their non-alcoholic counterparts. Giving up drinking can literally save their lives. But we know that Satan would love nothing better than to keep Christians numbed to God's Spirit and their lives in chaos and confusion. Not only that, but he seems to work overtime to defeat Christians, keeping them obsessed and dependent upon addictions which result in denial and shame.

There is Help!

The oldest, most famous and successful program designed to help is Alcoholics Anonymous. This self-help support system, which gave birth to a worldwide movement, was founded in 1935 by two long-time drinkers, Bill Wilson (who was a stockbroker) and Dr. Bob Smith (a physician). Even though the program was not "religious", the 12 Steps, that it is based on, have their origins in the Scriptures.

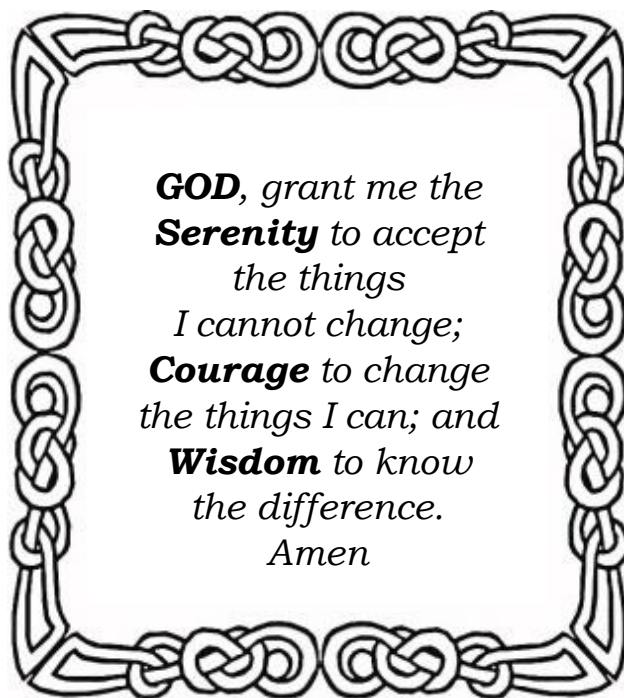
AA members are individuals from every walk of life, from every social status, of every race and creed. Some drive their Cadillac or Mercedes to the meetings. Others take the bus, arrive on a bicycle or even walk. True recovery crosses every age and status boundary, unifying people in their common quest for their very survival! Commitment to recovery and the refusal to remain stigmatized has helped to turn the tide on society's attitude toward drinking and recovery. This has helped to open new doors of hope for thousands. Mutual honesty, openness and willingness seem to be the key.

The question is: how can the alcoholic STAY sober? It can't be done alone. That's where Christ's power comes to the rescue! When the alcoholic admits their powerlessness, and becomes willing to turn their will and life over to the care of God, He enables them to "put the plug in the jug". The alcoholic doesn't have to "swear off forever" but just live one day at a time without that first drink! They need to remember that "*use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*" (*1 Timothy 5:23 NLT*) never works for an alcoholic! A "beer on a hot day" could be as disastrous for the alcoholic as a "sugar binge" is for a diabetic. Even cough medication should be alcohol-free if the alcoholic is to maintain sobriety. The usual pattern of relapse is that first the "man takes a drink, then the drink takes a drink, and then the drink takes the man". Alcohol – cunning, baffling, powerful!!!

How can we possibly cope or even fit in with today's society without an occasional drink? Well, a recovering alcoholic will tell you that their life has never been as full as it is in sobriety, with the new chemically-free lifestyle God has provided in the absence of that "old friend". God can do for the alcoholic what they are powerless to do for themselves! HE is their best friend!

The Bible says to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16 NLT)
There are effective support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Overcomers Outreach that have given hope to many hurting people.

Overcomers Outreach began in 1985 to provide a “bridge” between traditional 12-Step groups and the church. The OO groups include people struggling with a variety of addictions and/or compulsions, and who are seeking recovery. What a joy to discover the Steps in relation to their corresponding Scriptures. And how freeing it is to be able to call our “higher power” by His real name – Jesus Christ!



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