**The Word on Drinking Alcohol**

Small Group Questions:

1. Share in your group about the first time you drank alcohol.

2. Alcohol has a pretty negative reputation in society, why do think this is so?

3. Have you ever seen someone that was drunk? Tell us about it.

Drinking is a part of life here in South Africa. We drink under so many different circumstances. When we're happy, when we're sad and everywhere in between. Most of the time we can enjoy beer and wine. However, there are those people who abuse alcohol and this can have a devastating impact on themselves, their friends and their family. There is also a growing concern about the number of high schoolers who are drinking – you guys are the very people we are counting on to lead us in the next 20 years.

To put things into perspective, here are some facts about alcohol use in South Africa:

1 in 2 teenagers in the average South African home is a user of alcohol, that is half of you.

Almost half the learners (49%) interviewed in a recent high school survey said that they had drunk alcohol at some stage during their school career

In the same survey, 15% of guys and 8% of girls said that they’d had their first drink before the age of 13

Having five or more drinks in a single session is considered to be binge drinking and makes you a problem drinker

Half of the students who admitted to drinking (23% to 35%) said that they had had a binge drinking session (had five or more drinks on one occasion) in the month before the survey

People who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who have their first drink at age 20 or older

Teens that use alcohol are three times more likely to be involved in violent crime

Teenagers who drink are far more likely to try illegal drugs. In fact, research shows that 67% of teens who drink before the age of 15 will go on to use illegal drugs. They are 22 times more likely to use marijuana, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine

Some youth start abusing alcohol from age 12 and younger

60% of Grade 8 to 11 learners who abused alcohol in a local research study had to repeat their grade

But what does the Bible say about drinking?

The Bible actually has quite a lot to say about drinking. However Scripture does not actually forbid a Christian from drinking beer, wine or any other type of alcohol. In fact, some Scriptures discuss alcohol in positive terms.

Ecclesiastes 9:7 instructs, “Drink your wine with a merry heart.”

What God does command Christians regarding alcohol is to avoid drunkenness.

Ephesians 5:18 says "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The Bible condemns drunkenness and its effects (Proverbs 23:29-35). Christians are also commanded to not allow their bodies to be “mastered” by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12; 2 Peter 2:19). Drinking alcohol in excess is undeniably addictive. Scripture also forbids a Christian from doing anything that might offend other Christians or encourage them to sin against their conscience (1 Corinthians 8:9-13). In light of these principles, it would be extremely difficult for any Christian to say he is drinking alcohol in excess to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Alcohol is not, in and of itself, tainted by sin. It is drunkenness and addiction to alcohol that a Christian must absolutely refrain from.

Alcohol, consumed in small quantities, is neither harmful nor addictive. In fact, some doctors advocate drinking small amounts of red wine for its health benefits, especially for the heart. Consumption of small quantities of alcohol is a matter of Christian freedom. Drunkenness and addiction are sin. However, due to the biblical concerns regarding alcohol and its effects, due to the easy temptation to consume alcohol in excess, and due to the possibility of causing offense and/or stumbling of others, it is often best for a Christian to abstain from drinking alcohol.

The Bible never refers to underage drinking specifically. In Bible times, wine was the beverage of choice, partially due to the lack of water in the deserts of Palestine. Everyone drank wine, and there was no cultural or biblical prohibition against it. The Bible only commands against drunkenness, not against drinking. There is no mention, therefore, of underage drinking in the Bible.

However, if the phrase “underage drinking” refers to breaking the law by supplying alcohol to minors or imbibing by minors, then clearly it is wrong and the Bible condemns it. Romans 13:1-7 makes it very clear that Christians are not to disobey the laws of the land but we are to obey the government God places over us. God created government to establish order, punish evil, and promote justice (Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Romans 12:8). We are to obey the government in everything—paying taxes, obeying rules and laws, and showing respect. If we do not, we are ultimately showing disrespect towards God, for He is the One who placed that government over us. Therefore, anyone who breaks the law by buying or supplying alcohol to minors is guilty of law-breaking and is disobeying God. Minors who drink alcohol illegally, through underage drinking, are similarly guilty.