

Alcohol Use

Even though I'm not of legal age yet, I drink sometimes when I get together with certain friends because I want to fit in. It's not like I get drunk a lot or anything, so I don't feel like it's a big deal. But I have one friend who has a problem with it, so I find myself not even wanting to tell him if I've been to a party just so I don't have to deal with his disapproval.

You're not only avoiding your friend, you're avoiding a real problem, and it's not necessarily just with alcohol. Now, I'm not going to come out and necessarily say that you're on the road to becoming an alcoholic. Those are pretty strong words to direct at someone I don't know personally. But hiding your behavior from people you care about is one of the first stages and warning signs. Think about your friend's reasons for expressing his concern. Chances are it's because he truly cares for you and wants what's best for you; not because he wants to push his own agenda on you. Your reasons for hiding your behavior from this friend is because of fear – you fear his disapproval.

I could go into a litany of consequences for drinking, but it would just be repeating what you, and most people, already know from the staggering statistics of alcohol abuse and its consequences. You'd think our common sense would say, "Hmmm, I see the bad effects of alcohol use on individuals and society, so I'll not do that." But we continue to use and abuse, ignoring our common sense. We see the results of drinking alcohol in our schools, families, prisons and shelters, yet generations continue to indulge, including you. Why? It appears your reason for drinking with some of your friends is the same as your reason for hiding it from others... fear. Are you sensing a theme here? Your fear is causing you to make some poor choices, and fear has brought many others before you to the same place.

Fear... It's probably not what you expected to hear in response to your question. That's the real problem here. You're afraid of how other people will perceive you. You've allowed your fear to motivate you into breaking the law and lying to your friend. Not exactly what most people hold up as a banner of honor. Chances are that fear has also caused you to make other poor choices. So, what's the right response to fear? Courage. I'm not here to tell you what to do or what not to do. But you should stand up for what you know is right. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to face your fear for a greater cause. Be willing to stand up for something you know is right, even when risking acceptance, popularity or position. That's courage.

Every action you take is a result of a choice you make. To identify the most loving action in every situation, ask yourself these questions for each choice:

- Is it best for others? (Family, friends, peers, classmates, team, etc.)
- Is it best for me? (Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social.)
- Is it best for society? (Future generations, distant cultures, environment, community, and world.)

Keep in mind the definition of best when answering these questions. Best means the most excellent or most beneficial. Best does not mean the least work or the most pleasure. If you can honestly answer yes to all three questions, it is the loving and best choice.

Last, but not least, let's not forget that drinking alcohol before you are of legal age makes it illegal. You know... against the law, punishable by court, and an arrest able offense. The term "underage drinking" all too often softens the seriousness of the offense. There is a reason our authorities have established laws, and even though we may not agree with all of them, we are called to respect and honor them with our lives and actions.

When faced with difficult choices, or if you're struggling with certain behaviors, it's important to talk with someone about them. Share your struggles with a youth pastor, school counselor, or parent. They can help you and help build your courage to stand up for what's right.

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.

