

Quench Your Real Thirst

Quenching our real thirst: How binge drinking can become a substitute for close, satisfying relationships with others

By Judy Clark

One summer in Colorado, a friend and I met some runaways from New Mexico. They had dropped out of high school and wandered around dancing and holding out a cup for money. At first glance, you might think they were wasting their whole lives. But after I spent a couple hours with Gabriel, Sean, Matt, and Peter, I realized they were living out something most people long for.

These guys had little money, no shelter, dirty torn clothes, and barely enough food to stay alive. My friend and I invited them to dinner. We sat in a diner and watched the four of them devour hamburgers, burritos and shakes, and listened to their stories. I realized they were a community.



Real, healthy relationships: something we all long for

They looked out for each other. If one got something, he shared it. One guy only ate half his food because he wanted to share the rest with a buddy who wasn't with us. They talked about watching each others' backs. They were parents to each other. They really loved each other. They talked about being afraid, missing their moms, feeling abandoned, being hungry. They were living in a way that I would never choose -- but they had something that many clean, educated, "acceptable" people don't.

They had each other. They had real relationships. They were connected.

That's what we all want. We want real life. We don't want to be like the hamster who runs through the maze and spins on his wheel all day -- alone and never getting anywhere. We want to relate. We want to connect. We want to be part of a community that takes care of each other.

My friend Rebecca recently graduated from Vanderbilt University. As she faced entering the "real world," she said to me, "I just want to be Amish." Her comment had nothing to do with the religion and everything to do with the

community. They have neighbors and families. They help each other build barns. They come to the rescue when someone is in danger. Life is simple and slow, and you can handle whatever is around the corner because you know you're not alone. Sounds nice, doesn't it?

I think we're hungry for relationships that are lasting, full of trust and fun. Many of us grew up in homes where our dads worked too late at the office to get another promotion so they could buy the Rolex or Beemer. Moms had college degrees and families wanted the additional income so moms worked. Our parents lived under the same roof but that was about it. Relationships crumbled and divorce rates skyrocketed.

Beer: a popular substitute for healthy relationships

Whether it's *Grey's Anatomy*, *Sex in the City* or *Friends* reruns, we love to watch people who appear to be connected. And we desperately want that ourselves. We want and need good relationships, but quite frankly, they are painful and risky.

So, what do we do? Who can make me feel good? Who can I run to? Who can help me escape from a world of unconnectedness -- if only for a little while?

If you're like many college students, you cuddle up with a keg or caress a bottle of J.D. The booze makes you feel good and relaxed. It's accessible and always there when you need it. It doesn't care what you look like. It makes you feel funny, attractive and accepted. And it eases the discomfort that sometimes happens when bonding with others.

This relationship works for a while, but then you wake up. It's a one-night stand.

It probably comes as no surprise to you that we go looking for love in all the wrong places. Author and psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud writes, "We all need love during the first few years of life. If we don't receive this love, we hunger for it the rest of our lives. This hunger for love is so powerful that when we don't find it in relationships with other people, we look for it in other places, such as in food, in work, in sexual activity, or in spending money... drinking too much, or working too much."¹

Shelly, a student at the University of Alabama, said, "I can spend every night in the bars hanging out with my friends when we are drunk, but when I see them the next day on campus, we don't have anything to say to each other." Shelly has relationships, but she describes them as superficial at best. Her real need to be connected to people is not being met.

Ben, on the other hand, goes out drinking with his friends and the alcohol loosens them up to talk about what really matters to them. Their friendships

seem deeper. But Ben says, "I need to learn how to be real without the crutch of alcohol."

Our real thirst is for healthy relationships

Dr. Cloud goes on to say, "People are usually addicted to a specific substance, such as alcohol, cocaine, speed, work, gambling, destructive relationship, religiosity, achievement, and materialism. These substances and activities never satisfy, however, because they don't deal with the real problem. We don't really need alcohol, street drugs, or sex. We can live very well without these things. *However, we really do need relationship, and we cannot live very well without it.*" (emphasis mine)²

When I ask students why they drink, most respond, "It's fun." On the surface, that's an acceptable answer. But beyond the fun, have you ever wondered why you drink in the first place? Maybe it's a temporary escape from stress, the uncertainty about the future, or pressure in social situations.

When you have good relationships, you don't need to find security in something else, whether it's alcohol, sex or food. When you have good relationships, you're less likely to try to fill the void with something else. When you have good relationships, some of the deepest needs are being met.

Dr. Cloud continues, "Bonding is one of the most basic and foundational ideas in life and the universe. It is a basic human need. God created us with a hunger for relationship -- for relationship with him and with our fellow people. At our very core we are relational beings. Without a solid, bonded relationship, the human soul will become mired in psychological and emotional problems. The soul cannot prosper without being connected to others."³

How do we learn to have bonded relationships? Begin with being honest with yourself. Could it be that the reason you drink, or eat too much, or too little, or abuse sex, or drive yourself to perfection is because you really need relationships?

If so, there are plenty of good books on building relationships with people (including the ones by Dr. Cloud). But there is one key relationship that offers a genuine foundation for healthy relationships with people. Dr. Cloud talks about our need to be connected in a significant way to both people and God. French philosopher and physicist Blaise Pascal says that within the heart of every man is a God-shaped void that cannot be filled by created things.

Can we have a relationship with the God who created us? Can we be connected to God? I'm not talking about a God who gives you a list of do's and don'ts. Or a big policeman in the sky ready to bust you at the slightest

infraction. I'm talking about a relationship with God that's based on love and truth and freedom and inner peace.

Beginning a relationship with God

God created you to know Him. In the core of your being you know that. But all of us have rebellious spirits that say to God, "Hey, you go your way, I'll go mine. Don't bother me unless I need you." Some of us have said that. Others just think, If we can ignore the whole "God thing," it will go away. Still others of us say we want a relationship with God, but we want to come to Him our own way -- trying to earn our way. The truth is that none of us can earn or deserve a relationship with a perfect God.

Just as drinking or overeating has consequences, so does rebelling against or ignoring God. You may not even notice the consequences but eventually they'll catch up with you. God says the consequences are eternal separation from Him. You are in college now, hopefully having fun, preparing for your future. It's hard to think in terms of eternity...but you never know. My friend Steve, a 20-year-old guy, may not be alive by the time you read this. He's dying because he got HIV from infected blood. He has no choice but to deal with eternity now.

God has made a way for us to know Him here on earth and forever. He did this by sending Jesus to earth, to walk in our shoes, and live perfectly. But that's not all. We deserved punishment for our sins, but Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself on the cross on our behalf. All we have to do to know God is put our trust in the fact that Jesus paid for the junk in our lives that separated us from a perfect God. You can accept that and place your faith in Him or you can choose to reject him. That's your decision.

When I prayed to God, I told Him that I wanted to know Him and placed my trust in Jesus' death for me. I began a relationship with Him. I was now connected to the God of the universe. When our relationship is tight, my life is different. I don't need to run around trying to find the next thing to satisfy me -- whether it's money, drinking, or overachieving. When I blow Him off, I wander around trying to find that missing ingredient.

I don't know what you're dealing with. I don't know how the symptoms manifest in your life. Maybe it's excessive drinking, sex or drugs. Or being compulsive about exercise. Or killing yourself to get straight A's so you can feel good about yourself. These are all substitutes for our genuine need for connectedness with people and God. We all have that void within us that can only be filled by a relationship with God.

Maybe you would like to start a relationship with God right now. All you have to do is just tell Him. He knows the desire of your heart and is much more

concerned with that than He is with your words. You might want to say something like this:

"God, I want to know you. I want to be connected to you. I have tried other things to fill my need for you, and they haven't worked. Forgive me that I didn't come to you first. Thank you that you love me and want me to know you. I accept that you made this relationship possible through Jesus' death. I trust you. Amen."

You'll find a relationship with God fulfilling and satisfying. When you are connected with God you have the foundation to build meaningful, lasting and significant relationships. Quench your real thirst.

(1) Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 220. (2) Dr. Henry Cloud, *Changes that Heal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 64. (3) *Ibid.*, 47.

For more information on who God is or what it might be like to know God, please see www.EveryStudent.com. If you have a question, please email us and someone will send you a personal email reply.

If you have already received Jesus Christ into your life, here is a site to help you grow in your relationship with him, www.StartingwithGod.com.

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