

We Believe in the Pursuit of Sobriety

(Michael K. Colaw, updated Jan 3, 2026)

We believe that God created human beings as embodied souls, whole persons whose spiritual, emotional, and physical lives are deeply intertwined. Because of this, what shapes the mind also shapes the heart, and what clouds the mind can dull the soul. The pursuit of sobriety, therefore, is not merely a moral preference but a deeply spiritual discipline that aligns us with God's intent for human flourishing. We believe "life to the full" (John 10:10) includes the pursuit of a mind and heart that can be fully in the moment with God and others.

Scripture consistently presents a **sound and clear mind** as a gift to be guarded and a means by which we love God faithfully. The apostle Paul exhorts the church:

"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18, ESV)

Sobriety, in this biblical vision, is not an end in itself. It is a *condition of readiness*, a posture that allows the Spirit to lead, convict, and empower without rival influence. A clear mind is not empty; it is available.

Similarly, Peter calls believers to attentiveness and spiritual alertness:

"Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13, ESV)

Here, sobriety is connected to hope, action, and holiness. The Christian life requires clarity—not perfection, but attentiveness. We believe sobriety best positions believers to discern God's voice, resist temptation, and love others well.

Sobriety as an Act of Love

Jesus summarized the law with a call to love God fully and love neighbor faithfully (Matthew 22:37–39). We believe the pursuit of sobriety strengthens both. A sober life allows us to show up fully, to listen carefully, respond wisely, and remain present with those entrusted to our care.

Paul reminds Timothy:

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7, ESV)

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a **sound mind**." (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV)

Self-control (sound mind, NKJV) is not repression; it is Spirit-empowered freedom. In Wesleyan theology, holiness is not withdrawal from the world but the restoration of our loves. Sobriety helps reorder those loves toward God rather than substances that promise relief but cannot deliver wholeness.

John Wesley himself warned against anything that diminishes our ability to love God and neighbor fully. He wrote, “Anything that cools my love for Christ is the enemy of my soul.”¹ Sobriety, then, is not legalism, it is choosing a clear mind, ready to responsibly love.

Acknowledging the Complexity of Life and Medicine

At the same time, we acknowledge that life is complex and the human body fragile. There are moments when the temporary loss of sobriety is **medically necessary and morally permissible**, such as during anesthesia, post-surgical pain management, end-of-life care, or treatment for severe trauma.

Scripture affirms the goodness of compassionate care and physical healing. Paul even instructs Timothy:

“No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” (1 Timothy 5:23, ESV)

This passage reminds us that Scripture does not deny medicinal use of substances. The Wesleyan Church affirms medical wisdom, ethical pain management, and the alleviation of suffering. Using medication as prescribed for healing is categorically different from the recreational or habitual pursuit of intoxication.

Yet even here, we maintain that **sobriety remains the priority**, and any departure from it should be temporary, purposeful, and carefully stewarded.

Our Conviction and Our Posture

We believe the pursuit of sobriety offers the clearest path toward faithful discipleship, healthy relationships, and Spirit-led living. We also believe that grace must shape how this conviction is expressed. Many within our congregations carry stories of addiction, trauma, chronic pain, or recovery. The call to sobriety must always be paired with compassion, support, accountability, and hope.

As Paul writes:

¹ John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 310.

“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, ESV)

We pursue sobriety not to earn God’s love, but because we already have it—and we want to live awake to its fullness.

Invitation

We invite our churches to teach, model, and support the pursuit of sobriety as a life-giving practice rooted in holiness, freedom, and love. We encourage pastoral care, recovery ministries, medical wisdom, and Spirit-filled community so that no one walks this journey alone.

Sobriety is not the absence of joy, it is the soil where true joy can grow.

Selected Bibliography (Chicago Style)

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