

Episode 247

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Joining me today is Rose Ann Forte, and she's going to be discussing with me a topic that we get a ton of questions about. If you look at the top 20 questions of all time on Got Questions, one of them is, is that a sin to drink alcohol. We get so many questions about whether it's about alcohol, wine, beer, hard alcohol, social drinking, causing people to stumble, addiction, all these topics that are all related to the subject of alcohol. And so Roseanne has had a lifetime of experience with this issue, and so she's going to be helping me think through and answer hopefully some of these questions and explain it from perspectives I think will be helpful for you.

Shea Houdmann

So a little background on Rose Ann. She's an international best-selling author of a multi-award-winning daily devotional called The Plans He Has For Me. She helps people put alcohol and other substances to the side for 12 consecutive weeks by educating them with the scientific principles behind excessive substance use, using God's foundational principles to renewing your mind. She is the creator of the Choose Freedom program, which helps people solidify a change in their relationship with alcohol and other toxic substances over the long term. So Rose Ann, thank you for joining me today. Just tell us a little bit about yourself, your background, and how God led you into a ministry with helping people think biblically about alcohol and addiction and so forth.

Rose Ann Forte

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you for having me and giving me the opportunity to share my story. I think my story will sound familiar for a lot of people. I just start with I became a Christian later in life at 32 years old. Alcohol was a part of my life early on. I probably asked the same questions that your listeners and readers ask is alcohol a sin? My research indicated it certainly wasn't. We can talk a little bit more about that later. But over the course of several decades, a difficult marriage, managing a career, trying to be a godly wife, yet living in the world. I had a husband that wasn't Christian at the time. I used alcohol to cope with my stress. My marriage collapsed after 29 years. And by the way, I was a leader in the church. I loved Jesus. I was a treasurer. I was a Bible study leader. I spoke. I loved Jesus with all my heart, yet I was sitting here secretly struggling with this problem.

Rose Ann Forte

But after the collapse of my marriage, my drinking really went out of control, as if it wasn't a little out of control within it, but really life-threatening. But I didn't like any of the answers that were given to me in the world. I was resistant to 12-step, I'll just be honest. I was resistant to the labeling, the alcoholic labeling. I felt like I shouldn't be labeled by my sin. I was actually a heavy smoker too. I smoked cigarettes two and three packs a day. So I think I'm a good expert on addiction from first person. And just as background, nicotine is equally addictive as heroin. So I definitely have a passion and compassion for those who get stuck in this.

Rose Ann Forte

But the labeling didn't settle well with me. The steps didn't settle well with me. Character defects, even though I know that the 12-steps have brought so many people to Christ, saved so many lives. So I don't want to take away anything from that. But this is about my walk. I didn't share the truth with my pastor because of shame. I had years of counseling. I didn't share with my counselor because of shame. I just didn't want to be labeled. I didn't want to be put over into that group of people that, you're over there, you get that problem.

Rose Ann Forte

So eventually I ended up going outside the church. And it was at the beginning of COVID. And somebody said, hey, let's put alcohol to the side for 90 days and see what's possible and have fun. And I was like, what? Is that possible? Because by that time, it was pretty much an everyday, very large problem. I ended up signing up for that program. What I really liked about it is they called alcohol attractively packaged poison. So they made it about the lie of the society, about the substance, not about a shortcoming of mine. And I was very attracted to that. I went through the program. I quit. I had no intention of quitting forever. I just couldn't imagine it. It was just too much part of my life.

Rose Ann Forte

But I was so transformed by this that I was like, oh my gosh, this is like crazy good. I want to work for you. And I ended up working for the secular program and learning the science behind it. The science of how I was changing neural pathways and renewing my mind and focusing on gratitude. And I'm like, wait a minute. You're teaching God's word without God. You're teaching the kingdom without the king. And I ended up being an enrollment coach. So I would enroll a lot of people. It was kind of an expensive coaching program. And I would enroll a lot of people into this program. And they'd tell me they were Christians. And they felt so much guilt and shame. And they

didn't know how to stop. And I said, don't worry. You're going to see God's word written all over this.

Rose Ann Forte

And so I started collecting scriptures and prayers for all these Christian people that were in the secular program. And I would just have a little notebook and take pictures and send them to everybody. And they're like, this is amazing, Rose Ann. Keep doing this. This is so encouraging. And that's how the Daily Devotional was created. I just became obsessed with understanding the science that confirmed God's word.

Rose Ann Forte

And my mantra is God has told us all along what the truth is. We just chose to ignore it. And for me and for my audience, we paid the consequences, dear ones, to the point where if it wasn't for my relationship with Jesus, I think I would have committed suicide. But because of my faith in Jesus, I would just pray for him too. I'm like, OK, God, I'm pretty much done here. I'm ready for the proverbial bus. If you take me, I am good. I just want to be with you. And just being real about the place that addiction gets you to, it gets you to this hopelessness, that's very sad. So anyway, that's how the devotional was born. And yeah, that's my story.

Shea Houdmann

Well, that's amazing. And I love when God brings someone through a trial, a struggle like you, Rose Ann, and then calls the person that he just brought out to then minister to people who are still trapped in that in a meaningful and powerful way. And that is so cool. My wife and I were unable to have children. And so he has on multiple occasions given us opportunity to counsel other couples who are struggling with infertility. And so it's something that was very painful for us to go through and seeing how God redeems that. And then we get to be the cool aunt and uncle to other people's kids and pour into them in that way. So it's just, I love how God uses our life experiences and then transforms them into opportunities for ministry.

Shea Houdmann

So let's go ahead and with that background, so our audience knows you, knows who you are, at least a little bit, where you're coming from. Let's jump into some of the common questions. And just recently I had someone say, I attended this men's event at our church and they were serving beer as one of the primary things. And to my wife, especially, who was raised in a super conservative church, alcohol was absolutely a sin. I didn't become a Christian until my late teens, but was never really all that interested in alcohol. To us, to see this and hear this and to meet pastors who drink, and even here in Colorado Springs where I live, there's pastors who say, hey, come have a pint

with the pastor. They were actually advertising alcohol as an attractive thing to try to get people to come to church-related events. It's like, what in the world is going on?

Shea Houdmann

So you've got that side, and then you've got the other side that are like, no, alcohol is absolutely a sin, even the smallest drop. Christians should avoid it entirely. There's no instance whatsoever in which alcohol would be at all appropriate. So as I'm sure you know, there's a wide range of views on alcohol, but in your study of scripture, and really truly the most common question we get about alcohol is simply put, is it a sin to drink alcohol? Obviously it's not always phrased exactly like that, but that's the gist of it. So just Rose Ann, how do you answer that question? Is it a sin to drink alcohol?

Rose Ann Forte

Well, first of all, I'm going to refer it back to a question on your website, which I think summarizes it beautifully, because I'm going to do a flyover on it, and what I love about your website is that it gives detail, and it gives scripture to back up, and so we can just meditate on that word more slowly. But if we look up a question that you guys have, what does the Bible say about drinking alcohol? And you guys have laid it out beautifully.

Rose Ann Forte

The summary of that is scripture absolutely does not forbid alcohol, right? Surprisingly, some scripture can discuss it even in positive terms. We need to understand that Jesus's first miracle was turning water into wine, right? But you also go into some important information that wine wasn't the same back then as it is today in biblical times. A lot of times it was mixed with water, or they drank it in place of unsanitary water. And so what I like to really call out is we're asking this question, and the is clearly it's not a sin, right?

Rose Ann Forte

But that can get us in trouble. It certainly got me in trouble. I was on that side of it. I was probably one of the people that you just described at the beginning of the podcast, where all of my Christian Bible study friends would all get together, and we'd do happy hour, and we'd drink wine together, and there was a lot of it.

Rose Ann Forte

The problem is that when we ask one question like this, we don't pay attention to scripture as a whole, right? I always like to say, you know, there's a word in scripture, and the word belongs to a sentence, and the sentence belongs to a paragraph, and the paragraph belongs to a chapter that has a meaning, and the chapter belongs to a book, which has a purpose, and the book belongs to

the entirety of scripture, which has a beginning and an end story, right? And so while we can ask that question and answer it easily, there's a bigger picture involved here around alcohol. And so I want to set the stage for, as we have this entire conversation, is first understanding that God's word is truth, right? If we can start with that, then we can agree on a lot of things that we're about to talk about.

Rose Ann Forte

And the first one, you know, we all as Christians, we know John 14:6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. That's one truth. But John 17:17 also says, sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth. So I just want to set the stage that all of scripture is truth. And that's what we're going to try and focus on.

Rose Ann Forte

So the truth about the entirety of scripture is that we have an enemy. And he is the prince of the air of this world today. Right? And John 10:10 reminds us that the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. So again, have this in the background, because this is truth. It's truth, whether you're a believer, or you're not a believer that the enemy only has one purpose to steal and kill and destroy to deceive us, right. And the other favorite verse of mine, of course, in my work is First Peter 5:8, which calls us to be sober minded, right? Why? We need to be watchful because your adversary, the devil howls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. So with those, the Word of God is truth. There's a formidable enemy trying to deceive us, which is why we'll go back to the question. No, it's not a sin. But what are the consequences? What else does God have to say about using substances? So he certainly calls out our substance use or drunkenness and Ephesians 5:18, right? Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Well, anyone who has the history that I do, can certainly attest to this, right?

Shea Houdmann

Rose Ann, I can't tell you how many times we've gotten a question where it starts off with, so I got drunk and, and then described how that one event led to a tragic series of consequences that totally destroyed someone's life. So I hear you 100%.

Rose Ann Forte

Over and over again, right? We when we being meh about wine, like I can leave it or take it is one thing. But when we progress into what society shows, it needs to be present at all social events. It, it helps you relax, it helps you do this, it helps you do that. That's where we can get in trouble, right? But Ephesians 5:18 says, instead, instead of drunkenness, be filled with the Holy

Spirit. And, you know, when we talk about alcohol, it's called spirits. Why is it called spirits? Because spirit is the essence of what it's made up, right? So do you want the spirit of drunkenness in your life? Or do you want the spirit of God being filled in your life?

Rose Ann Forte

And another scripture I pulled out is 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8, night is the time when people sleep, and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clear headed, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet, the confidence of our salvation. And so there's, there's clear differentiation about how we live our life and light and truth and love, right? And so the Bible clearly calls out drunkenness as a sin.

Rose Ann Forte

Now, here's one of my favorite verses, it very much aligns with science. But John 8:34 says, Jesus is talking, and he says, truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. And this is any sin, it can be drunkenness, it can be using any idol, whether it's, you know, a financial idol, any idol, if we practice, practice, practice, we become a slave to it. And that it's no different. You know, that's how our mind works. That's how God created our brains. He wanted to create some energy saving mechanism for us to not have to learn something every single time anew.

Rose Ann Forte

So the best place this can be shown is driving to and from work. Once you have it practiced, your subconscious mind or your unconscious mind can just get you there. You don't have to think about it, you've practiced it, it's energy saving, you can move on. Well, your brain is indifferent to whether you practice good things or bad things, they both get stuck. And they become literally neural pathways in your mind, they become a way to operate. And so that's why we become a slave to it. Because we've developed the neural pathway by practicing it.

Rose Ann Forte

Yet, God does say we can renew our minds, right? He said at first, we can shift our thinking, we can create new neural pathways by shifting the way we think. And so I'm going to bring up Romans 12:2 in light of alcohol, really cool when you read it this way. It says do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, then you will be able to test and approve what God's will, his good and pleasing and perfect will. When we're doing alcohol, and we're not doing alcohol, we can test which one is better, which one is giving us the better result. And when we practice something new, we can renew our mind. So that's the good news. That's the exciting news.

Shea Houdmann

Looking through the history of questions we've answered in a personal experience, there's some alcoholism in my family history. And to me, I don't drink. It is a, I would say, I can't remember, it was probably a couple of years ago, the last time I had anything with alcohol. And I don't particularly like the taste. It's expensive. And I don't want the risk. The easiest way to never become addicted is to not start. I don't want it to hurt my testament. There's so many reasons why I don't drink.

Shea Houdmann

But I am also of the conviction that I don't necessarily think it's wrong, a sin, to have a glass of wine or an occasional beer, those sorts of things. But my main question is, why? Why do you even want to? Why is even the church sometimes not putting pressure on people to engage these sorts of things? There's so much better, healthier things we could be putting in our bodies. There's just really no reason to. And I think God gave me a distaste for alcohol, and it makes it super easy for me.

Shea Houdmann

But the problem is, so many people who have that mindset that it's not a sin, well, that means it's okay, and starts with just occasional, and then occasional becomes frequent, and frequent becomes constant. And then that's where addiction comes in. That's where drunkenness comes in, which the Bible clearly does say is a sin. So you start off with the, you call it a gray area, so to speak, but very few people stay in the gray area. It's so easy to get from there into the places where the Bible specifically says, don't go there, and that it seems to be so, so true with alcohol.

Rose Ann Forte

Absolutely. Absolutely. And again, on the science, some of the, this came up, I think, in the last month, well, especially since COVID, right? Everything was shut down, but alcohol became a necessity. We could deliver it to homes, and that's when I received a lot of phone calls of like, I was okay until COVID. And then we could do it hiding, we could do it in our homes, we could do it to alleviate stress, we could have it delivered to our homes, right?

Rose Ann Forte

So here's some statistics that are frightening. Alcohol is now the third leading cause of preventable death. First is smoking, second is obesity, third is alcohol. It is labeled now as a class one carcinogen, right? The International Agency for Research on Cancer classifies alcohol as group one carcinogen. This is the highest risk group, which also includes tobacco, asbestos, and radiation.

Rose Ann Forte

If you are diagnosed with cancer, one of the first things your oncologist will tell you is you need to stop drinking, right? So this is what we're talking about. The truth of God's word mixed in with the truth of our circumstances, mixed in with the truth about what science is finally coming to light. If your listeners do a search on whether or not there is really any evidence of the health benefits of alcohol, those have been all mitigated. There is no level of alcohol that is considered safe.

Rose Ann Forte

Can other people drink it? Sure. If it's meth, you know, fine. But I used to be one of those people who was like, why do I, why can't I be in a group, you know, of Christians and drink? That just seems so, ew, you know, they have the problem, not me. And maybe at that time, I didn't have the problem. But why was I saying that? Because I couldn't enjoy myself with fellow Christians without alcohol? I think there was an awareness lacking in my thinking. Like, why was it so important for me to show up and drink with my fellow Christian friends? Because now that I'm free of this, I realized the connection with people is so much better without a substance than with. The substance creates a false sense of connection. God meant us to have a real sense of connection with people.

Rose Ann Forte

As a matter of fact, here's another super cool scientific fact. When you have eye contact with somebody, and you're in their presence, and there's eye contact, it produces something called oxytocin. They are now, the FDA is now looking at drugs for alcoholism that uses oxytocin to help stop craving. What we're, what we're really craving is deep connection and love that cannot be found in a substance, right? It cannot be found when we are not soberminded. Not being soberminded, as you so aptly described, invites Satan to come in and go, let's, you know, I forget all these rules, right? I'm playing by your rules, and we won't even get into the things that, you know, we all do when we're not soberminded. There's not much that is more, is God-focused. I am certain that I did not bring any light to any other human being when I was under the influence of alcohol, certain of it.

Shea Houdmann

Well, Rose Ann, I know your specialty, at least the focus, is helping people with alcohol addiction. So I think we've covered the main question, the, is drinking alcohol a sin, biblically speaking, and then just the wisdom of why it's best to avoid entirely. So how about let's cover addiction in part two. I think that'll be a good episode in and of itself. So, and as we talked beforehand, we recognize this is a controversial issue, recognize this is something that Christians definitely agree to disagree on. So hear our heart on this. We

actually do not believe the Scripture does not say that alcohol is a sin, but the whole counsel of Scripture, if you look at everything Scripture says about it, there are far more warnings about the danger of alcohol than there are. A few instances where, yes, Jesus changed water into wine. Yes, there are some things in Proverbs, how alcohol can have a positive effect on your mood or whatever, but let's not focus on the positive, few positive places in Scripture, instead focus on the warnings, focus on what Scripture points us to instead of alcohol, like to do not be drunk with wine, instead be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Shea Houdmann

So here, that's our heart in this episode. No, it is not a sin to drink alcohol in extreme moderation. We believe it is a sin to get drunk. I think Scripture is very clear. And then addiction, we should not allow our bodies to be mastered by anything. So in that sense, yes, being addicted to alcohol is a result of sin, it is a sinful act, but we're going to get into that in part two, so please come back. So Rose Ann, thank you again for joining me, and I'll see you on the flip side.

Rose Ann Forte

Thank you for having me, it's been a pleasure.