

In light of a tragedy, the decision not to drink is a good one

October 29, 2015

By [Randy W. Bright](#)

By the time you read this article, the news of the death of four people and the injuries of 47 more in Stillwater will be five days old, and while Oklahomans and others around the nation will still be mourning the loss, it is sad but likely true that it will not be long before the incident will be largely forgotten - but not by those families who were the most deeply affected at the loss or pain of their loved ones.

It is equally true that thousands of people are killed each year by drunk drivers, and my family was one of those who suffered a loss. I hope that what I am about to share with my readers, especially those who have never felt the pain inflicted by a drunk driver, will help them make better choices.

I will start by saying that even though I was brought up at a young age being taught by my church that drinking was a mortal sin to your soul, I don't believe that drinking alcohol is a sin and I do not condemn those who drink responsibly; but it is like any other behavior that goes beyond what God intended for it, it becomes wrong when it is abused.

In 1963, my cousin Terry Graham (older brother of Mike Graham, who produces the Story of Jesus Passion Play in Florida) was destined to become a powerful pastor. Terry was given a gift at a young age to be an effective speaker and evangelist. He led many of his friends in high school to Christ.

When he was a teenager, Terry entered the Boy Preacher contest that was held in the Kiamichi mountains in southeast Oklahoma. At a time when travel was not so easy, Terry made his way from southern Illinois to this large gathering of Christian men from all over the country, and won the contest.

When Terry graduated from high school, he went to Cincinnati Bible College, returning home for the summer after his freshman year.

At that point in his life, Terry was engaged to be married and had decided that when he finished seminary he would head to the Congo mission field in Africa. During his summer break from college, he preached at a small country church. It seemed that Terry was destined to do great things with his life.

After a Sunday service that summer, Terry was driving home in his black Volkswagen bug, when he rounded a sharp curve known for frequent accidents on a two-lane highway. An oncoming drunk driver in a large car crossed the center line and struck him head-on, killing him instantly.

Back in those days, drunk driving was considered just an accident, and the driver was never charged with vehicular homicide. Terry's family sued the driver, but the case resulted in a hung jury.

I was nearly eight years old when my father took my brother and me to the salvage yard to see the car. I will never forget seeing Terry's Bible laying on the floorboard, covered with drops of blood. It was at that point that I vowed I would never drink, a vow that I have kept since then.

When I was in high school, it was the popular thing for kids to get drunk on weekends. On two separate occasions I told two friends that they needed to stop before they killed themselves or someone else. One of them acknowledged my warning, but didn't stop. Driving at a high speed on a gravel road, he slid his car broadside into a tree, the impact so powerful that it broke his car into three pieces. The other one, who got drunk with another friend, convinced a drunk 14-year old girl to drive their car. She pulled in front of a semi and all three were killed.

When I was in college, I went to bars with my friends to make certain that they got home safely. Even by then, poor attitudes about irresponsible drinking prevailed. At a time when I became a designated driver before its time, on several occasions I was asked to leave the bar if I wasn't going to drink alcohol.

And believe it or not, one elderly woman from a European country told me that I wasn't a real man if I wouldn't drink.

Others I know well have been deeply affected by alcohol abuse, which for privacy reasons I won't go into, but I will say that the consequences of alcohol abuse are serious and painful to them and the people around them.

Some drink responsibly; others drink to forget their problems, to submit to peer pressure, or to self-medicate physical or mental anguish, or both.

But I am here to tell you that you can be just as happy without drinking, and that there is hope for those who decide to quit. For alcoholics, they need professional help, because quitting abruptly can be very dangerous.

Little is known about the young woman who killed and injured so many at Stillwater at this point, but it is obvious that her choice to drink and drive makes her deserving of a stiff sentence and some help as well.

It wasn't just her choice to drink the day of the tragedy. It likely started with a decision made years ago.

My advice is it is better to never start. It is a decision that I have never regretted.



Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972 rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

©2014 Randy W. Bright

Previous articles written by the author are available for reading at his website.