

Peter Venable's Testimony

My story isn't particularly dramatic or tragic compared to most others' experiences. But by God's grace, far worse consequences could have happened to me. I am grateful to be alive before you, because I could have easily been dead—on many occasions due to drinking and drugging, and worse, driving.

I was raised in a 1950's suburban homes; dad was a business man and we were middle class. In that era all families had bars in their homes and the liquor flowed at cocktail parties. Mom became a functional alcoholic; she said later dad was on his way toward alcoholism. My aunt said mom was at times critical of me, which contributed to my low self-worth. I felt there was something not OK about me. Such is shame.

As a teen I was abnormally and painfully shy. I avoided eye contact with girls in the hall and classroom, feeling terribly insecure and inadequate; I was smallish, not athletic enough to make teams and as I refused to study, had a "D" average. I felt like a misfit: didn't fit with jocks, the brains or the greasers. An outcast, a misfit.

As a junior in HS, having a good tenor voice, I joined a rock-and-roll band as a backup singer. I was terrified—I had to sing in front of teenage dances! I stole some of mom's gin, drank it straight, and it tasted like turpentine. But the alcohol rush gave me liquid courage. I even danced with a truly stunning blond! Thus my weekend dependence on alcohol began.

I began smoking pot at 21. My weekends became saturated with beer and weed. I did some pot dealing and it was God's grace I wasn't busted—despite some very close calls. Back in the 70's those busted with pot served active time and I could have had a major trafficking felony.

One time I was driving from NJ to NC in a VW Bug, seriously hitting on a joint. I passed out on Route 17. As I vibrated awake, I felt the car rumbling and crashing into bushes, and the car stopped some 50 feet from the highway. It was a miracle I didn't lean to the left and crash into someone on that 2-laned highway. Again God's grace or my guardian angel—or both.

On another occasion, after consuming beer and weed I made it to my driveway and passed out behind the wheel. That was a lethal trend—driving after drinking and potting and worse, a few times adding acid tripping—and again I thank God for Him not being disgusted with me and abandoning me. I was a habitual DWI offender who didn't get busted. Scripture applies to me:

Romans 1:24 *Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.*

I never was any big ladies man but I fornicated whenever possible. I had a problem with what is now dubbed "erectile dysfunction during my 'opening-night jitters'" and for years wanted to pick up a girl successfully. Macho-man wanting to get laid. Finally I succeeded: I met a woman at a bar, and later we fornicated at her place in the aftermath her snores applauded the performance, so I slinked out of her place. *Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,* No big thrill and the next week I got a STD test, which was negative. This was before HIV began—lucky me.

Many weekends I was alone and lonely. My room was like a crypt, a sheet-rock coffin. I supposed I wallowed in self-pity. I felt like I had a broken life without a spare. How did I contend with this aching loneliness? Pot and beer. Beer and pot. I lived in quiet desperation. And the next day I hated myself for smoking when I vowed that I would not. Deep down I knew marijuana controlled me.

I know that in my drugging era if crack had been available, I would have used it and ended up in the same addictive mess most crack users experience. I last used other drugs in 1973, but kept on with beer and pot.

I once fornicated with a buddy's wife who came on to me and hence committed adultery. I was infected with lust. Let's face it: I was a slut.

On February 18, 1978, I drove towards Chapel Hill one evening. Streetlights flashed by my open car window at dusk. A thought occurred to me that seemed to be more than just simply a thought. It was a vivid question:

"Are you going to accept Jesus has the Son of God?" It startled me, and echoed my mind as I approached Sanford. Another question, not nearly as reverent, interrogated me.

"Are you going to shit, or get off the pot?" God speaks in a way that gets attention, does He not? Got my attention real quick. I was flabbergasted. The questions would not go away. Finally I opened up my window, and said

"Yes, I believe the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." In fact, I yelled this through the window to remind me that I was serious about this commitment.

But my confession of faith was not dramatic; not like night to day. I was a half-assed Christian. Mine was more of a dawning with some dark clouds obscuring God's light. I still drank and potted and if possible, fornicated. Sounds like I still had some of NA's "reservations," doesn't it? I attended church faithfully and read my Bible. Finally the Holy Spirit convicted me and I committed to sexual abstinence and quit fornicating. At least I was in the right direction. I met my beloved wife Christine in 1978 and we married in 1980 and we've been together some 36 years. I vowed to remain faithful and thanks be to God, I was, am and will always be faithful to her.

In 1982 Jessica was 6 months old and on that Saturday morning I drove to a drug store for Pampers etc. I hit a "J" on the way there and on the way back, I threw out the roach out the window, and a thought struck me, "This is nothing but a lonely trip." It had the same impact as those thoughts when I accepted Christ as Messiah 4 years earlier. I knew I had to hide my pot use from my wife because she disliked me being spacey and absent-minded. I lived a lie. Me and my secret. Somehow I knew that was it. That was 34 years ago. Was I addicted to it? Hell yes. No doubt, no denial about it. I don't hesitate to tell my clients at Daymark and ARCA that fact. (Please, please do not have the delusion weed is harmless. More BS.)

Over the years—and this is going to sound like pure BS but I am bring fearlessly honest—I did limit drinking on weekends and eventually drank one beer or one glass of wine; I simply didn't have AA's craving to drink after one drink. I was no compulsive drinker. I don't have that genetic vulnerability with the obsession, tolerance and compulsion all alcoholics have. If I did, I would tell you. But that's not the point. Let's say I had my spiritual awakening about my drinking that I'll now describe.

Some years ago I counseled a federal inmate who was in the local federal 1/2 house, and since I volunteered in the Cherry Street prison ministry, I wanted to connect with him that I was an inmate advocate. After some conversation he spontaneously said he was once a youth pastor and that he drank moderately on weekends. At a restaurant he had a beer with dinner and his pastor saw him, and later said that pastor told him that he could not drink and be a youth pastor. The client said to me "I was not ready to stop so I resigned my youth pastor role to continue drinking."

Then, he looked at me and said "You can't drink and be a part of that ministry." Now understand, I never mentioned I drank! Did that dude read

my mind? I was shocked and struggled to retain my professional demeanor and role. But the impact was dramatic. It pierced my soul and conscience. I felt guilt and regret. I felt God Himself was speaking to me. It's been well over 5 years since I last drank. I could not stand in front of you now, if I used alcohol. I conclude I am fasting from alcohol for the lord—in His Power, I am on an alcohol fast. People fast from food; I do beer and wine.

Yes, I am tempted when I occasionally socialize with moderate drinkers. I am certain God protects me. My worst temptation to drink was last winter when I visited my wife's brother and sister in Florida. Her brother is an AA member, sober 15 years. After a meal he and I were outside watching a sunset over the beach on the west coast of Florida talking, and I confessed to him I had an urge to drink. He looked at me and simply said "Don't do it" and smiled. Wow—nothing profound about that! Sounded like Genesis 6:6 when God spoke to Cain: *And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.* Sinful temptation always lies at the door, wanting to master me. Jesus, in John 8:11 said to the woman caught in adultery, *"go and sin no more."*

I accept the fact alcohol is a legal drug and most restaurants serve it. I too must quote those powerful verses that every recovering addict should have at hand or memorized: 1 Cor. 10:13 (write this down or mark your Bibles!) *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."*

Addiction is idolatry. Any compulsive obsession and compulsion is idolatry, whether cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, porno, dealing drugs, computer and internet compulsions and committing crimes. Idolatry.

As I end, like I said at the beginning, my story isn't that dramatic or fascinating. Far worse consequences could have occurred and I refuse to credit "lady Luck." I was—and am—graced my God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. I am clean and sober only due to God Almighty.

I confess to you that my love for Christ is not what it should be; I struggle against the "idolatry of Me."

So what about my low self-esteem and sense of shame and not being OK? All I can tell you is that the more I strive to be in Christ, the less my self-esteem matters. I once read humble esteem is not thinking less **of** yourself, but thinking less **about** yourself. Forget me, focus on Christ. Perhaps the verse that best describes this is 2 Cor. 5:17...

I end with a few verses from 2 Corinthians 12:9 when God responded to "a *thorn in the flesh*" which Paul had. Our *thorn in the flesh* is surely addiction or addictions, but God's answer works for me: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" *Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.* Amen

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