

Preface

“Would you smoke pot with me?” I was 13 years old living in southern California and it was my first day of 8th grade. For some it’s the constant peer pressure that works you over and then you succumb. Not for me; I sought it out. I picked one of the school “bad boys” and asked the question that would begin my journey of drug and alcohol abuse for the next 20 years. Recreational pot smoking and occasional beer drinking gave way to an endless array of uppers, downers, cocaine and LSD.

As I matured, I seemed to grow out of the illegal drug use, as one might grow out of teenage fads or a prom outfit. I ended up, however, exchanging one type of addiction for another, as a “beer or two” on the weekends led to a six pack every night. As my drinking buddies and I used to say, “Wine is fine - beer will bring you cheer - but liquor is quicker.” Shots of tequila became my drink of choice. They quickly and efficiently brought on the familiar ‘buzz’ of self-medicating liquid comfort.

It’s not that I didn’t seek help along the way. I took an alcohol education class, signed up for an online “freedom” course, and went to private counseling. I memorized Bible verses, submitted to “accountability” partners, and fell on my face before God in prayer. Initially, I had the most success by attending a local Alcoholic Anonymous program. I really loved being with a group of people and getting the support I needed. I participated in that 12-step program for probably a year, and then I was clean and sober for quite some time. But after a few years I thought, *“You know, I’ve got a handle on this, I learned my lesson.”* I remember one Christmas Eve I started drinking again thinking, *“This is the time! It’s Christmas Eve. It’s okay to have a drink on Christmas Eve! I have learned my lesson, I can be moderate.”* Now “off the wagon,” I returned to drinking again, but this time I went underground.

I was a closet drinker. The social and religious circles in which I ran would have easily tolerated “moderation,” but my appetite for drinking had long since passed that ambiguous line of demarcation. I was leading a double life: the ideal father, husband and people-helper on the outside, but on the inside I was dying a slow death. Spending hundreds of dollars on booze, weaving webs of deceit, and carefully scheduling each drink slowly took its toll on every ounce of self-esteem and pride that I had. I finally hit bottom.

As the ancient proverb says, *“When the student is ready the teacher will appear.”* It took a lot to make that phone call but I knew I needed help. On the other line was Katy Kok (pronounced “cook”) from New Horizons Counseling. I will never forget her first words to me: *“We are here to help you, not to judge you.”*

I know now that our phone conversation was a divine appointment from the sovereign God of the universe. Her gentle and wise approach resonated with my soul. At first I was her client, then her

friend, and finally a colleague. I want to thank Katy and her sister Lori for entrusting their practice to me and allowing me to interpret it in my own way. Many of the thoughts and ideas presented in this book were inspired by these amazing women. The world is a better place because of their contribution. I am grateful to God for their presence in my life.

Over the years I have added many dimensions to the program that I now call “The Choice Process,” but the foundation and basic premise that were scribbled on a yellow pad from two sisters sitting on a California beach in the 70’s remain the same.

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