

Overcoming Alcoholism

There is Hope!

Alcohol can be an uncomfortable subject. If you have an alcohol problem it's not easy to admit it and seek help. If you know someone with a problem, confronting them with the issue or knowing how to help can be very difficult.

If this describes you, it will take a bit of courage, but please keep reading. Set denial aside for a moment—and you'll see, there is real hope.

If you have a drinking problem and are still reading, that's a good sign. Maybe you're to the point where you're fed up with your addiction and the crippling consequences like health

problems, job loss, jail time, and broken family and friendships.

If you're at this point, you can finally begin breaking free.

If you can honestly admit to yourself that alcohol has become a problem in your life, then the door to recovery is starting to open.

It's time to have real relief. It's time to start rebuilding and restoring your life with the power only God can provide.

If it's not you, but if it's your spouse, family member, friend or coworker that has a drinking problem that affects you—you too can find real help and support today.



What does an alcoholic look like?

Many would likely be surprised to find that functioning alcoholics and people who regularly abuse alcohol are today in all walks of life. People who regularly abuse alcohol as a coping mechanism for life, and those who are afflicted with the American Medical Association-defined disease of alcoholism, go to great lengths to hide their abuse or addiction. Far too often, spouses, friends and family members become unfortunate enablers, allowing the alcoholic the capacity to continue abusing.

Photo: Digital Vision/Thinkstock

Only an estimated 2 to 3 percent of alcoholics match the stereotyped image of a “skid row drunk,” stumbling around in an alley or under a bridge. Most alcoholics and alcohol abusers go

to great length to hide the dangerous level of drinking they indulge in.

Alcohol abuse creates much broader problems than are typically formally attributed. Almost any law enforce-

Are you just an occasional heavy drinker, or on the way to serious health issues?

Take this short questionnaire to help find out:

- Do you lose time from work due to drinking?
- Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
- Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
- Is drinking affecting your reputation?
- Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?
- Have you had financial difficulties as a result of drinking?
- Do you turn to inferior companions and environments when drinking?
- Does your drinking make you careless of your family’s welfare?
- Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
- Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?
- Do you want a drink the next morning?
- Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
- Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
- Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
- Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?
- Do you drink alone?
- Have you ever had a loss of memory from drinking?
- Has a physician ever treated you for drinking?
- Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?
- Have you ever been to a hospital or institution on account of drinking?

Answering yes to just three of these questions represents a sign of concern that your drinking behavior may be leading to serious issues, according to the Office of Health Care Programs, Johns Hopkins University Hospital, who are the developers of this well-known screening quiz. The more “yes” answers beyond three, the more likely you may be developing increasingly harmful behaviors associated with alcohol and alcohol dependency. From ministers to physicians to professionals to everyday housewives, alcohol is no respecter of persons.

Remember, admitting you have a problem is a not a weakness—it is a strength and a good sign of starting to recover from potentially lethal or highly harmful problems.

Overcoming Alcoholism: There Is Hope!

ment official or probation officer will confirm that roughly 75 percent of all crimes resulting in a prison or jail term involve alcohol in some form.

And it for certain doesn't stop there. Alarming, but perhaps not surprisingly, a University of Washington study released in 2012 showed that up to 15 percent of U.S. surgeons had experienced problems with alcohol abuse. That's higher than the 9 percent general rate of reported alcohol abuse in the American population.

One of the organizers said that it's possible that the percent of surgeons with alcoholism is underestimated in this study. Why? Just like other abusers of alcohol, the people who were less likely to respond might have shame

If alcohol is "no respecter of persons" when it comes to surgeons, physicians, nurses, radiologists and other medical professionals, what does that mean for you?

and fear associated with their alcohol abuse and dependence. Nobody wants that stigma.

The Talbott Recovery Center in Atlanta, Georgia, is one of the most successful rehab centers for treating physicians, nurses and other professionals struggling with alcohol and substance addictions. Their medical director stated:

"There is this issue of personality traits in our patients. Obsessive compulsive, avoidant and passive-aggressive personality are over-represented in our patient population. Our patients have a dense blind spot to the manner

in which their fixed ways of thinking, behaving and dealing with real life situations interacts with their addiction and impacts their lives in many different ways" (<https://www.talbottcampus.com/index.php/about-us/medical-directors-message>).

And if alcohol is "no respecter of persons" when it comes to surgeons, physicians, nurses, radiologists and other medical professionals, what does that mean for you?

As noted elsewhere in this study aid, occasional and moderate use of alcohol is permissible from a biblical perspective.


But alcohol used to mask chronic symptoms of anxiety, depression, interpersonal issues, family or work

problems and other issues can quickly and decisively lead to a progressive emotional, physical and spiritual condition where things will go badly in a hurry. Let's face

facts: If you're hiding how much you're drinking from others (who probably at least already suspect that something's up), then you're already in trouble.

The good news is that being in trouble with alcohol doesn't mean that you're dead. But it does mean that *you need to get out of denial, get honest and get help*. Stop trying to fix things, to manage things, to control things. Humility, self-honesty, and surrender are on your list. The sooner you take action to start on a road to recovery, the faster things will turn around for you.

There is hope!



Alcohol abuse What can you do?

Whether or not you are personally facing issues surrounding alcohol abuse or earnestly want to help someone in the midst of alcohol-related issues, what can you do?

The problems associated with alcoholism, alcohol dependency and alcohol abuse thrive in an atmosphere lacking actionable knowledge, real awareness and sensitive understanding. Many misconceptions, misunderstandings and prejudices about alcohol abuse, alcohol dependency and the disease of alcoholism often perpetuate the problem and prolong the suffering of all concerned. Denial of the problem itself often represents a major challenge, as many people with serious alcohol issues evade detection by semi-controlled or "hidden" drinking (e.g., ensuring that

one drinks alone without companionship in order to conceal the quantity of alcohol being consumed).

Taking the time to secure a real understanding of the nature of alcohol abuse, its causes, how it advances into a disease state and what can be done in treatment (especially during the potentially dangerous period when an alcoholic suffering from clinical disease symptoms faces withdrawal and potential seizures) are all critically important.

Doing this right can save a life! One of the fastest ways to literally kill an

Photo: Vladmax/iStock/Thinkstock



alcoholic consumed with near-insane raging thoughts of self-hatred and suicide is take away any and all hope. Intelligently planning an intervention with a professional, finding ways to connect a suffering alcoholic with recovering alcoholics and educating family members about the positive, but sometimes tough, roles they can play in recovery—all of these can be very helpful.

Here are some specific ways you can become enlightened and helpful in the battle against alcohol abuse and alcoholism:

Prevention

This is the most important step of all. As advances in genetic science have demonstrated, there are thousands of people for whom *drinking is never an option*. As university studies have shown, people with certain genetic traits are at risk even with their very first drink! If you have a family history of alcohol abuse or alcoholism, evidence shows that you should be very careful with alcohol. Genetic factors that involve individual production of the dopamine neurotransmitter can produce high risk factors. The same is

true of those with dopamine deficiencies who unknowingly drink to artificially stimulate dopamine production to overcome shyness or chronic anxiety. Other environmental factors can play a role in subsequently overdrinking or harmful alcohol abuse.

The Internet offers helpful advice and information from many qualified medical schools and treatment centers. Qualified and tested support organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous publish much of their literature and treatment information online. And, of course, brick-and-mortar libraries

across the planet hold much useful information about this critical subject.

Recognition

How would you recognize a problem with alcohol in your life or someone else's? When is alcohol abuse a direct sin? When does it advance to the point where it is a medically recognized disease and "willpower" has become irrelevant? Alcoholics and abusers of alcohol often go to great lengths to conceal the increasingly higher levels of alcohol they consume. At some point, they begin to drink to feel normal. At that time, having ready access to alcohol displaces rational concern for family, friends and well-being. What are the symptoms of this stage? When you recognize it, what do you do?

Referral

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, what should be done about it? If you're in a church congregation, is your pastor competent to help? How should you seek professional counsel?

How much do you know about treatment programs? How much do you know about the possibilities of developing and conducting an intervention (supported by professionals)? What happens at AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), which is supported by professionals? Why is AA considered a spiritual program with its 12 Steps?

Understanding and Support

Chronic abusers of alcohol, those dependent on alcohol, and those afflicted with the recognized disease of alcoholism, often live under a heavy burden of guilt and shame. Heavy abusers of alcohol suffer cognitive and emotional

Photo: fotoslaz/iStock/Thinkstock

Overcoming Alcoholism: There Is Hope!

impairment that often takes months to recover from and correct after a person completely abstains from drinking. Recovery itself generally produces a whole new set of circumstances that some families find very difficult.

In short, recovering alcoholics and their families usually need much love and support. Early recovery can be confusing and troublesome, but it's worth it! Family members often find they have to both protect themselves and also come to an understanding as to what part they have contributed to the formerly dysfunctional family.

Jesus came to heal and “to set at liberty” those captive by afflictions like alcoholism (Luke 4:18). He is today able to reach out to suffering people and offer them healing help and hope!

Clinical alcoholism represents a progressive disease that left unchecked will spiral to the bottom of the barrel—medically, financially, emotionally and spiritually. If not stopped, it is 100 percent fatal. Too often those who finally seek help only do so after “hitting bottom”—running completely out of options.

With proper understanding, you can relieve suffering, plant a seed of hope for yourself and embark on a new life of spiritual recovery. God offers real power to those who surrender themselves (Ephesians 1:16-21).

Please use this opportunity to learn how to be of help. You can be a lifeline, providing direction, support and encouragement as God grants you the opportunity!

Drunkenness is a sin

While the Bible is clear that the proper use of alcoholic beverages is not wrong, the act of drinking *too much alcohol* (drunkenness) is continually condemned in God's Word.

The wrong use of alcoholic substances that results in drunkenness is a sin against God. It has caused untold misery and countless premature deaths. The apostle Paul wrote: “Do not give way to drunkenness and the ruin that goes with it” (Ephesians 5:18, Revised English Bible).

Abuse of alcohol causes untold harm to the abuser, his or her family and society. And drunkenness can keep a person out of the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).

Christ instructed Christians to

take wine as part of the Passover service (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). Paul was also careful to teach responsible, moderate alcohol consumption. In the context of this instruction, Paul corrected some of the Corinthian church for getting drunk at the Passover (1 Corinthians 11:21).

People with an inherent proclivity toward alcoholism should not use alcohol, even in moderation. Those under the legal drinking age should obey the law, and no one should feel that they have to drink on social occasions. But most people can learn to avoid the abuses so prevalent in society today and can properly use alcoholic beverages in moderation if they desire.



What does recovery look like?

When an addict or abuser of alcohol enters into a post-drinking and/or abusing stage, they are said to be entering a new stage of recovery.

What does recovery mean? Is there a “start and stop” period? What can one expect from “recovery”?

Recovery means many things to different people, but what it does mean in all forms is that a chronic alcoholic or abuser of alcohol has made a commitment to completely abstain from drinking alcohol. That person in recovery is now trying to fashion a new life without the influence of alcohol.

“Recovery” means exactly what it

says. Just like a person who is overtired or worn-out from a major trial or physical test, a recovery period is required to get back to normal.

A person suffering from clinical alcoholism initially enters an acute withdrawal period where the body has to chemically adjust many processes and start to repair physical damage. This same period includes the time when the brain's cognitive functions undergo change and many behavioral patterns—

Photo: Krasnyuk/iStock/Thinkstock

Overcoming Alcoholism: There Is Hope!

from sleep habits to eating healthy meals—have to undergo change.

It takes time

Simply put, it generally took quite a bit of time to become addicted to alcohol, and recovery from active major overdrinking takes its own time.

Whether the person taps the aid available from Alcoholics Anonymous (www.aa.org) or other recovery groups, the initial time of recovery is usually marked by a period of major adjustments across the board. Depending on how far their condition had progressed, many recovering alcoholics are stunned that they are in non-drinking recovery at all. Many are initially absorbed in trauma and guilt for what they did to others while drinking. Many face financial difficulties and other challenges, which over time will likely get better, but in the short term are energy- and time-consuming.

The power of the Almighty God can rescue and restore an alcoholic to sanity and a joyful life.

The families of recovering alcoholics also often find themselves in an entirely new form of stress. An alcoholic family is a dysfunctional family, with non-drinking family members often contributing their own problems or challenges to the dysfunctionality. Take the alcohol out of a dysfunctional family, and they often don't know how to react.

Accordingly, if the entire family can embrace recovery techniques, the odds of lasting recovery and the development of a sane, loving and truly happy family

life increase dramatically. For many, this development in recovery may represent *the first time ever* of being in a truly loving and happy family!

If a former alcoholic manages to withdraw from alcoholic behavior without help and then tries to stay sober without help, they often become “restless, irritable and discontent.” Their emotional dysfunctionality remains, even though they are no longer drinking, leading some to state that they are in a condition of a “dry drunk.”

Recovery takes place on many levels

Going into true recovery is a multi-level undertaking. If one begins to attend AA, they find that there is true spiritual power available that helps cancel out cravings for a drink, as well as a group of recovered (or recovering) former alcoholics who can offer direct advice and encouragement for staying with recovery and avoiding a relapse.

AA also offers the opportunity for an alcoholic to discover the true behavioral underpinnings of ego, fear, selfishness and other character defects that laid the foundation for their subsequent physical and chemical abuse. Further, and most importantly, AA members can learn the spiritual solution to these problems and learn how to develop a practical relationship—called “conscious contact with God”—with their designated “Higher Power.” AA is most definitely *not* a religion, but its defined 12 Steps help each individual develop a specific relationship with Jesus Christ or God the Father (as they may understand their

Higher Power). While it is not the only treatment option, AA's spiritual approach also encourages recovering addicts to adopt a life of service to others.

Quoting the book of James, the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous rightly states that “faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:26, New International Version). Members often speak of “working the Steps” to advance their recovery and improve their quality of life.

Non-drinking family members can also receive help from or attend Alanon,

How about you? Are you ready to give up the twisted life of “fix, manage and control”? Are you ready to surrender your life to care of a mighty spiritual Being who alone has the power to set you aright, fully on a new road to recovery?

the AA-related help group (www.al-anon.alateen.org) for those who suffer from family and environmental behavioral issues related to alcohol abuse.

Whether it is through AA or another recovery group, one thing is clear: The power of the Almighty God can rescue and restore an alcoholic to sanity and a

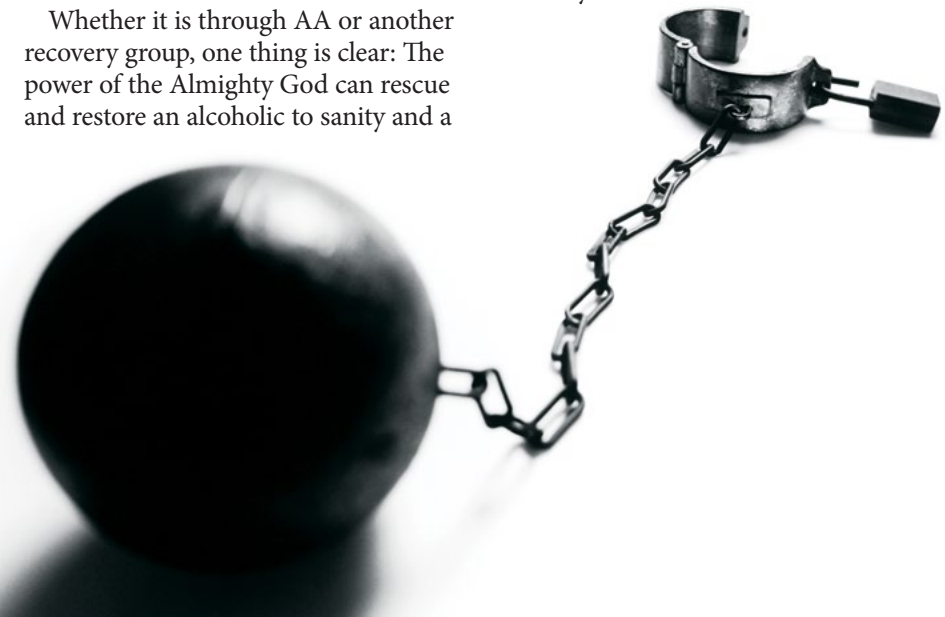
joyful life. To a newly sober person who suffers from terrible “jitters,” chronic anxiety, financial problems, suspicious family members and the like, such a claim may seem far-fetched.

But the reality is that just counting AA members alone, more than two million people have found the power of God through a spiritual solution. They have found the “incomparably great power for us who believe” (Ephesians 1:19, NIV) and the “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). As the saying goes, a newly recovering alcoholic sees a recovered, sober and

happy AA member and time and time again says: “I want what you got.”

How about you? Are you ready to give up the twisted life of “fix, manage

and control”? Are you ready to surrender your life to care of a mighty spiritual Being who alone has the power to set you aright, fully on a new road to recovery?



The choice is yours

Thousands of years ago, God Himself offered a group of people a simple choice. They had to choose one of two ways of life.

Today, if you've read this far, God is probably making the same offer to you. The powerful words read like this. Are you ready?

"I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live!" (Deuteronomy 30:19, NIV). May God Himself help you directly to find that answer! A new life in recovery is but one decision away—now choose life!

It's time get rid of the pain and sorrow that comes from drinking too much alcohol and alcohol addiction. God's Word is plain—He wants the best for you. He loves you, and He wants you to experience the incredible blessings of life—a life free from the bondage of alcohol.

Recovery won't happen overnight. It's going to take work. It will take humility, and it takes surrendering yourself to the will of God. But it can be done. God is ready to help you, day or night. There is hope!



What's Inside

2



Introduction

4



What does an alcoholic look like?

7



Alcohol abuse: What can you do?

11



What does recovery look like?

14



The choice is yours

Photo, cover: Andrew_Mayovsky/iStock/Thinkstock

© 2014 United Church of God, an *International Association* — www.ucg.org
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Contributors: Milan Bizic, Don Hooser, Tom Robinson, Mike Snyder, Larry Walker.
Reviewers: Peter Eddington, Darris McNeely, Steve Myers. *Design:* Mitchell Moss

106/1403/1.0