

20

Good Reasons to Stay Sober

(Even if you don't have a drinking problem)

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This book is dedicated to my wife Kristin, my kids Ashlynn and Nathan, special friend Jerry Goldsmith, and to the handful of people who stuck by me when the chips were down.

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Introduction

Wisdom can be obtained one of two ways...

- 1) Wisdom can be taught and learned
- 2) Wisdom can be obtained through pain

Once advice has been given to someone, it becomes that specific individual's decision to apply it to his or her own personal life, or disregard it. In a nutshell... "Take it, or leave it". Some people are taught important lessons about life and apply what they have learned shortly after the lesson. There are some things about life that we have to learn the hard way...through pain. There are also people who continue to make the same mistakes over and over again.

Because I am a man who has experienced much pain due to my own poor decision-making throughout my life, I claim to have a fair amount of wisdom regarding certain aspects of life. I feel that I have also gained a fair amount of wisdom through witnessing pain in others.

I decided to write this book when I found out my wife was pregnant. The thought of bringing a life into this world with the possibility of having them experience emotional pain to the extent of my own personal sufferings was not a good feeling. I realize that all of the advice I have to offer isn't going to prevent my children from experiencing different forms of pain throughout life. Countless people could write a book of this nature (as the information contained herein isn't rocket science), but I couldn't find one which contained information that my child might be able to relate to as a teen or young adult. Therefore, I decided to write my own book for my children to read when the time becomes right based upon my personal testimony. My hope is that the people who read this book might consider some of the concepts herein in an attempt to avoid unnecessary pain.

The only difference between an alcoholic and a drunk person without a drinking problem is that an alcoholic gets drunk more often. The same negative results from an alcoholic getting drunk can happen to a "normal everyday drunk person" who may not have a drinking problem. This is important to remember.

The title of this book is twenty good reasons to stay sober. A separate book probably could be written for each of the twenty reasons that I have stated. I have chosen to keep the story telling to a bare minimum, keeping each reason short, sweet, and to the point.

By far, alcohol use/abuse has solely had the largest negative impact on my life. When reading this book, I ask that you look for similarities and not the differences in relation to your own life. I would like to take this opportunity to share some concepts regarding alcohol that I have learned, observed, and experienced to all of those willing to listen. It will be up to the reader to determine whether or not the information which follows is information that should be considered when making certain decisions throughout life's journey.

Alcohol and Us

As human beings, we are pleasure seekers. We want to gain as much pleasure as possible, while experiencing the least amount of pain. We want to feel comfortable. We want a sense of peace. We want to feel safe. We want to have fun. Most of us would like to experience joy and happiness. We want to feel confident. We like to relax. Most of us want to feel a sense of purpose and importance. I feel that it's also safe to say that most of us would like to experience love in one form or another. We want meaning in our lives. We want people to like us and respect us. We want to feel good about ourselves and who we are.

The purpose of this book isn't to belittle people who drink, or to condemn alcohol itself. However I do feel that our society takes the power of alcohol for granted. I also feel that it is important to make clear the devastating effects that alcohol can have on just about every aspect of people's lives. I challenge you to read what follows with an open mind, and to analyze your own personal behavioral patterns.

People consume alcohol for one of two reasons (or both)...

1) To alter their state of consciousness

2) To be "sociable"

I do hear people say they drink because "they enjoy the taste". I may have bought into that some years ago and taken the statement itself at face value, but I would have to say **for the most part** this really isn't the case. A person who says they drink because they like the taste may actually find the taste pleasing, but is actually drinking for one of the two reasons listed above. This may be consciously, or sub-consciously. If you claim that you drink beer solely because you enjoy the taste, I challenge you to experiment with non-alcoholic beer to determine if you experience the same level of satisfaction.

I heard a guy once say, "How can you enjoy an authentic Italian meal without a good bottle of wine?" Well, I think that even this guy would be drinking for one of the two reasons listed above. Without going into detail, cracking a frosty cold beer on a really hot day would also fit into one of the two categories.

Now, there may be a very small exception. There are people who claim they drink alcohol due to the medical statement that small percentages of alcohol consumed on a regular basis will decrease the chance of heart disease. Once again, my experience tells me that the majority of people who make this claim are actually drinking for one of the two reasons listed above. There are many alternatives to heart disease prevention other than alcohol consumption.

The “Social Drinker”

The term “social drinker” is a watered down term that is really hard to define. If I had to give a definition for this term, I would define a social drinker as “someone who drinks infrequently and can control their drinking”. If you ask someone if they drink, most people will put themselves in this general category.

There are people who can “drink socially” and are able to control their drinking. There are also people who claim to be “social drinkers” who drink infrequently but have a difficult time stopping once they get started.

Then there’s the “Jeckle and Hyde social drinker”. This type of “social drinker” drinks infrequently and sometimes is able to have a drink or two and be content. Then there are times when the “Jeckle and Hyde social drinker” cuts loose and won’t quit drinking until they pass out, throw up, get in a fight, run out of money, or get cut off (meaning they get so drunk that the bartender refuses to further serve them)...amongst other reasons.

Altering the State of Consciousness

There are people who deal with physical pain better than others. Generally, when people have a headache, or some sort of minor physical pain, they take aspirin or another form of painkiller to relieve the pain. Many normal everyday people tend to deal with emotional pain or emotional “voids” in a similar way. People who do not deal well with negative, or even positive emotions may tend to “medicate” themselves with alcohol or other substances in an attempt to get rid of a particular emotion or feeling. They try to suppress these feelings. Much of this kind of behavior may even be subconscious; although this is one reason people “alter their state of consciousness”. I once heard a man say, “I refer to my bartender as my pharmacist.”

There are many people out there who try to fill certain voids in their life by acting in a wide variety of irrational ways. Many times, they go as far as to violate their own personal code of morals in an attempt to fill these “voids”. I do happen to believe that alcohol consumption is one of the most common ways (if not the most common way) that people attempt to fill certain “emotional voids”. These emotional voids or negative feelings can be any feelings from the absence of love, to a feeling of boredom, to a feeling of inferiority, to a feeling of loneliness, to a general sense of discontentment. I once heard a guy say, “I drink because when I wake up in the morning, I hate the thought of knowing this is the best that I’m going to feel all day.”

I was having a conversation with a guy from work one day and we got onto the subject of alcohol. This guy said that after work he was going to buy himself an 18-pack of beer. I asked him, “Just out of curiosity, how long does an 18-pack of beer last you?” He said, “An 18-pack of beer will last me a whole week. I like to get home from work and have a couple beers. My wife is unattractive to me, and I keep thinking that if I have a few beers that she might look good to me.” This is one type of example of using alcohol to alter the state of consciousness.

How many times have you heard someone say, “I **need** a beer”, or “I **need** a drink”? If you say that you **need** a drink, what you are really saying is, “I would like to alter my state of consciousness.” If you have already been drinking you might say, “I need *another* beer”. In this case, what you are really saying is, “I would like to alter my state of consciousness some more. I’m still not content with how I feel.” Most of the time people do not request another beer because they are thirsty.

People who drink and get drunk on a semi-regular to regular basis have lost the ability to cope with certain aspects of their life. Their “coper’s” are broken. These people have come to rely on alcohol and it’s sedative affects to cope with various thoughts, feelings, or circumstances.

Remember that we are pleasure-seeking people. We don’t like pain, whether it is physical or emotional. Emotional pain, certain “voids” in people’s lives, and the fact sometimes people are not comfortable with some of the situations they may be in, are all reasons that people “medicate themselves” and “alter their state of consciousness”.

People’s drinking habits obviously vary from person to person, and just because one drinks, I do not put everyone in the same category regarding alcohol usage as I do myself. The fact is some people have a drinking problem and they know it. Some people have a drinking problem and won’t admit it (to others or themselves). Some people have a drinking problem and don’t know it. Some people drink from time to time and do not have a problem at all. Then there are the non-drinkers who abstain from any alcohol consumption.

Beer, wine, and hard liquor can be found everywhere. You don’t have to look hard. This powerful drug is legal. Countless drugs that are less powerful than alcohol are available only by a prescription from a doctor. Alcohol consumption plays a major part in many people’s lives during their quest for pleasure, or lack thereof. It is important to know just how much of a lie alcohol is in direct correlation with our pursuit for peace and pleasure. Nonetheless, we all have emotions and feelings which need to be dealt with on a daily basis. It is how we deal with these feelings and the decisions that we make as individuals that make us who we are.

As I have stated in the introduction, the only difference between an alcoholic and a drunk person who does not have a drinking problem is that an alcoholic gets drunk more often. No matter if you are a person who likes to have a beer or two after work, have a few beers at family get-together, have a couple drinks on Friday or Saturday night at a club, take clients out for a good time, or just like to party-hearty, let’s talk about some reasons why it’s a really good idea to stay sober.

Reason # 1

“Partying” is Expensive

I never realized how expensive it was to “party” until I quit drinking. There’s so much more money left over at the end of the month without having to budget for alcohol. I still have entertainment in my monthly budget, but now I get much more for my money without having to budget for drinks. I really wish I had a nickel for every dollar I spent on alcohol. God only knows how much money I’d have.

Bars & Clubs for the most part are such a rip-off but the prices are set based upon supply and demand. The prices vary from club to club but people are willing to pay \$2.00 - \$10.00 for one beer! Wine, well drinks (Screwdrivers, Rum & Cokes, Long Island Ice Teas, etc.), and shots of whiskey can range anywhere from \$2.00 - \$20.00 per drink depending where you are and the time of day.

There is also one aspect in relation to the price of alcohol that I need to include. Fine wine can be very expensive. In some of your finer restaurants it is common to see wine on the menu ranging anywhere from \$250-\$500 and up per bottle. That’s ridiculous! I have never tasted wine that costs \$500 per bottle but it I have a hard time imagining this being a good value.

You’re probably not going to get very far if you go out on a Friday or Saturday night to “paint the town” with less than \$40.00 in your pocket for the night. It’s easy to spend anywhere from \$50 - \$100 a night on just alcohol alone. This isn’t to mention the amount of money one spends on “other things” while under the influence that people normally wouldn’t buy while in a sober state of mind.

I remember leaving for the evening with \$100.00 in my pocket and telling myself, “Ok Dave, you’re taking \$100.00 but you can only spend \$40.00.” I’m smart enough to know that I couldn’t spend the extra \$60.00 if I just left it at home along with my ATM card. Although, there is no worse feeling than taking only \$40.00 and at 10:00 o’clock being out of money. So, I would take the extra money as a “security blanket”. I would always drink at the pace I wanted to, especially if I knew I had the “security blanket” of the extra sixty bucks in my pocket. Normally, the first thing that I would do the morning after was to scramble for my wallet and dig into my pants pockets to assess the damage. Nine times out of ten, I would find that I dipped into my reserve money and then I beat myself up all day long for spending so much money. Not to mention the stress of trying to figure out if I had enough money to go back out that night!

Obviously if you purchase alcohol from a grocery or liquor store you’re going to save some money opposed to going out and buying drinks at a bar or nightclub. Although, people are willing to pay up to twenty times the price to drink in a “more festive” atmosphere.

No matter if you buy your alcohol from a bar, nightclub, airport lounge, or convenience store, it's far from a good investment. I heard a guy say, "you don't buy beer...you rent it!" It's the truth. Eventually your "buzz" will wear off, and the majority of the beer ends up going down the toilet...literally. You only hold onto it for a little while.

Not everyone spends every free dime they have on "partying" as I did. Although, I do challenge you to examine just how much money you spend on alcohol. You can do the math according to your own "social habits", but let's just say you spent \$25.00 a week on alcohol. That's still about \$100.00 a month and \$1,300.00 a year (if you multiply \$25.00 x 52 weeks).

**On the average, how much money would you estimate that you spend on alcohol per week?
Per month? Per Year?**

It adds up fast. What are some alternative things you think you could do with this money?

I consider this to be one of the least important 20 reasons to stay sober, but still a good reason to do so. Later on, I'll talk about some of the other "costs" that can be associated with drinking, such as court fines, attorney fees, etc.

Reason # 2

Loose Lips Sink Ships

Ever hear the old saying “loose lips sink ships”? Personal and professional relationships are greatly affected by the little things we say, whether it’s positive or negative. How many times have you been in a conversation with someone from work, with your mate, or maybe even a friend and said to yourself, “I wish I hadn’t said that.” It happens to all of us. The impact from the things we shouldn’t have said will vary depending on the circumstance.

Add alcohol into this equation, and it adds a whole new chapter into the “I shouldn’t have said that” book. Sometimes people will have a drink to “loosen up”, or use alcohol as a “confidence builder” in certain social situations. This is a form of altering the state of consciousness. When we “loosen up”, very often people tend to say things they normally wouldn’t say if they were sober. This isn’t a good thing.

I’m sure millions of people have been emotionally hurt by something someone else had said to them while under the influence of alcohol that they probably would not have said if they were in a sober state of mind. I’m not working off of any documentation to back this statement up, but I feel it’s an extremely accurate educated guess. Feel free to conduct your own survey.

When having a few drinks in “social situations” sometimes we gossip about people who we really shouldn’t be gossiping about. Sometimes we reveal information which could be damaging to our own reputation or someone else’s. Revealing information we shouldn’t reveal, or gossiping about someone we shouldn’t be gossiping about, takes place even when we are stone cold sober. Although, a logical personal-shield is broken when we start drinking and our lips become much more loose. This meaning, as we become under the influence of alcohol, decisions begin to be made out of emotion rather than logic. Therefore, the things we say can potentially be more damaging while under the influence of alcohol opposed to being sober.

I’m sure “loose lips” which were triggered by alcohol have ended, or have caused serious problems in countless personal relationships. Personally speaking, when I was in my younger days, there were numerous instances where I would wake up in the morning and call my girlfriend to apologize for the things I said the night before. I always used the excuse, “I’m sorry...I was drunk”, or “I’m really sorry...I just had too much to drink”.

A friend of mine had a mother who was in her late seventies to early eighties. She had a friend of 35 years come to stay with her for a few weeks. The two elderly ladies liked to have a couple to several cocktails in the evening. During one of the nightly social sessions, the elderly guest made a comment to my friend's mother which was something to the affect of, "You care more about animals than you do people". My friend's mother was really offended by this and the two old ladies got into a heated argument which resulted in the elderly guest demanding to be taken to the airport the following day to go home. These are two sweet old ladies whose friendship spanned over 35 years. This friendship was stained by loose lips provoked by alcohol.

Fights break out in bars all of the time. I have been in a number of them myself (normally on the receiving end of the whipping). Fights also break out just about everywhere there are large groups of people and alcohol...sporting events, concerts, etc. Almost always, these acts of violence are stimulated by something someone under the influence of alcohol has said to offend someone else.

There used to be a popular T-shirt which read: "INSTANT JERK...JUST ADD ALCOHOL". "Jerk" wasn't the real word that was used on the T-shirt but you get the idea. I have heard people say, "Oh, I'm a happy drunk." Basically what they are trying to insinuate is they become this jovial person who everyone likes being around. This may be true to a point, but no matter if you are a mean or happy drunk, the logical personal-shield does come down and you are left wide open to saying things that maybe should not be said.

Has there ever been a time you said something you should not have said, which you probably would not have said, if you remained sober?

Have you ever been offended or hurt by something someone else said who was under the influence of alcohol?

Alcohol greatly enhances "loose-lip syndrome". Loose lips will sink ships. The ability to maintain a solid command over the things we say to other people is a good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 3

Why Make Yourself Sick?

I consider there to be three different stages in which you can make yourself physically ill or sick with alcohol. The first two stages are the most common, while the third stage normally only happens to people with very serious drinking problems. This doesn't include long-term health effects such as cirrhosis of the liver.

I'm not a medical doctor or a chemist so I'm going to avoid getting into too much detail. I simply would like to refrain from publishing information which is scientifically or medically incorrect. I would like to offer my "generalizations" of the three stages of sickness associated with alcohol...

Stage One – This would include vomiting or “throwing-up” due to the body's lack of tolerance to the amount of alcohol that has been consumed.

Stage Two- This would be “the morning after” hangover symptoms.

Stage Three- This would be severe withdrawal symptoms due to excessive alcohol abuse over very long periods of time. This would include Delirium Tremens, or DT's. People who suffer from DT's may experience several or all of the following symptoms: confusion, disorientation, hallucinations, hyperactivity, and significant cardiovascular trouble.

I have a separate section for Stage 2 “The Ever-Popular Hangover”. In this section, I want to talk a little bit about Stage 1...

The very first time I got drunk, I was 14 years old. I was at a friend's house and he had a bottle of something (I'm not really sure what it was), and he asked me if I wanted to take a couple shots. I really don't remember all of the details, but I do know we both ended up taking numerous shots of this stuff. I went home and the only thing I remember is lying on the bathroom floor in a pool of vomit that resembled several cans of watered down refried beans. I wish I would have learned a lesson from this experience, but unfortunately the experience wasn't bad enough to prevent me from doing it again and again.

When I was stationed in Korea our unit was given the privilege of touring the “OB Factory”. “OB” stands for “Oriental Brew” and is to Korea what Budweiser is to the United States. The beer factory and the tour were fascinating. At the end of the tour we were given a large “OB Mug” and led into a room with a bar and numerous tables. We were told that we could drink as much free beer as we wanted for ten minutes and then we had to leave. It became a frenzy. If you tell a group of soldiers that they can have all the free beer they want for ten minutes, I guarantee you there are going to be some people who make themselves very sick. That's exactly what happened. After the ten minutes of fast and furious drinking, we left the factory and loaded up on a bus to go back to the base. The base was about an hour drive from the factory. During

this hour drive, half the bus was either peeing out the window (there was no bathroom on the bus), or throwing up out the window. Some didn't make it to the window before they puked. The bus reeked of vomit. The people who peed out the window got into some serious trouble when we got back but at the time they really didn't have much choice.

Please tell me, how much sense does this make? For the most part, we turned a really neat educational experience into a self-induced miserable one.

In my teens up through my mid twenties, one of my philosophies was "I go to work all week and do what I'm supposed to do...I *deserve* to party hard on the weekends". One of the reasons I developed this philosophy was due to the fact that subconsciously I did not know *how* to have a good time without drinking. The thought of going out dancing, shooting pool, throwing darts, or just hanging out without drinking was absolutely out of the question. Today, I have a much different perspective as I had to *learn* how to have a good time without drinking. I also found out that I can go dancing, shoot pool, throw darts, and hang out without drinking...and have a really good time doing so.

Don't get me wrong; I believe rewarding yourself and having fun are extremely important in maintaining a balanced lifestyle. However, exactly what I do to reward myself for working hard and what I consider to be fun has changed.

There are people who work very hard during the week and then reward themselves by getting drunk and making themselves very sick. They may think "they're partying", and because of the misconception of the term "party", they may go out and do it again the very next night or the very next weekend. I've been on both sides of the street, and in my opinion, this is not a way of being good to yourself.

Have you ever made yourself sick by drinking too much alcohol?

If so, do you think there may be different ways to reward yourself, or different ways you could have a good time?

Preventing yourself from becoming physically ill is a good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 4

The Ever-Popular Hangover

Anyone who has experimented with alcohol has probably experienced a hangover. The morning after results from drinking too much alcohol the night before which gives us symptoms of severe headache, nausea, anxiety, diarrhea, increased heart rate, insomnia, dizziness, excessive thirst, ringing of the ears, sweating, shakiness, and a general feeling of misery is what we refer to as a hangover.

There is some debate over what exactly causes hangovers. Again, I'm not a medical doctor or a chemist so I'm going to avoid the debate, but I do have my own formed opinions based on personal experience and the research that I have done.

One thing is for sure; you can find hundreds of home remedies and suggestions on how to avoid a hangover. People post advice messages in news groups on the Internet in regards to this topic which include: "don't drink on an empty stomach", "avoid certain types of drinks", "take a multi-vitamin and eat crackers before you start drinking", "drink a gallon of water before you go to bed", "eat a banana and take a Vitamin B pill before you drink" and on and on and on. Some people even make the absurd recommendation that the best way to prevent nasty hangover symptoms is to stay drunk.

There are also numerous herbal supplement products on the market which claim to cure hangovers. I've never tried any of these supplements myself, but I have read reviews on certain products. I believe there are pain-relievers and supplements you can take to ease the effects of the previously mentioned symptoms, but the general consensus is that there is no bulletproof method of curing a hangover except to let your body heal itself by letting time pass.

There are all of these tips, products, and suggestions on how to cure or avoid a hangover, but what I find really interesting is there is very little advice stating the best way to avoid these miserable symptoms is to stay sober or avoid drinking altogether.

When I was in my late teens and early twenties, I didn't suffer from hangover symptoms nearly as bad as I had experienced them as I got older. If you talk about this with people who are in their thirties plus, I'm sure for the most part, they will tell you the same. One of the reasons for this is as I got older, my body (including my liver), did not process the alcohol as well as it did when I was younger. I also found out that as I got older it sometimes would take *two* days before I felt like a human being again.

Even though I didn't suffer from hangover symptoms as bad in my late teens and early twenties, I still suffered from them. I was about twenty-four years old before I started not waking up to my alarm clock and not making it to work on time. Even when I would wake up to the alarm

clock, this was the point in my life when I started “calling in sick” to work because I was either still drunk from the night before or suffered too badly from hangover symptoms.

It was around this time when it was first brought to my attention, by my boss at the time, that I might have a drinking problem. I suppose if you randomly call in sick 1-2 times a month, and on numerous other days come into work reeking of alcohol, it’s certainly worth considering. I laughed it off. My take was, “I just like to party, and sometimes I overdo it a bit.” At that time, I didn’t really understand what a drinking problem or an alcoholic was, nor did I have to suffer any severe consequences from my drinking habit. Therefore, I was not open to the suggestion “You might have a drinking problem.”

I have missed some very important meetings and appointments due to massive hangovers. The worst thing about this is the people who really knew me had a pretty good idea for the reason I was absent. I may have been able to fool some of the people some of the time, but it got to the point where I couldn’t fool anybody.

Even if I would discipline myself not to drink during the week, more often than not, I would “cut loose” on Friday night and be hung-over in bed all day on Saturday...miserable. That’s really no way to spend a Saturday, and it’s really not a good way of rewarding yourself for working hard all week.

Can you count how many times you have experienced a hangover?

Have you ever missed an appointment or had to call in sick to work because of a hangover?

This may sound like a stupid question but really think about it... Can you name some alternative activities you would enjoy other than spending the day sick in bed or on the couch?

Suffering from hangover symptoms is no way to spend the day. A Hangover is a self-induced, painful sickness that prevents one from making the most of your free time. This is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 5

Bed Wetting

This is kind of a funny reason to stay sober. It's really so insignificant in correlation to some of the very serious reasons to stay sober that I debated whether or not to list this reason. I decided to include this reason because it can be an important, valid indication of a possible drinking problem and can be common for some people after a heavy night of drinking.

I drank heavily since I was about 15 years old. I quit drinking for good at 30. I don't think I peed the bed due to excessive drinking until I was about 26. What is significant (which I don't have an explanation for) is that once I started getting drunk, passing out, and wetting the bed, I continued to do so, on a very regular basis when I drank heavily up until the time I quit. During the last four years I drank, I would have to admit that a good percentage of the time I drank heavily, I peed the bed. That's a lot of humiliation, wet sheets, and stinky mattresses.

There are very few worse feelings I have experienced than the feeling of waking up with my mind in a fog, realizing that I was soaked, and had peed the bed. Suffering from hangover symptoms combined with the demoralizing feeling of peeing the bed (and all over yourself and/or your partner) is beyond being able to explain.

Have you ever peed your bed after drinking too much?

By the way, bed-wetting is pretty common for some kids and most eventually grow out of doing so. What's interesting about this is, I never wet the bed as a kid nor have I ever wet the bed as an adult when I was sober. Therefore, if this hasn't been an issue for you in the past, as in my case, it certainly can become one. If you wet your bed after drinking heavily, this should become a "red flag". ("Red flag" meaning that you probably ought to examine your drinking habits.). If you pee your bed after a night of drinking you need to take a good close look at your drinking habits. Do I need to say this again? Yes. If you get drunk, pass out, and pee your bed, you need to check yourself.

Wetting your bed because you drank too much is just not a cool thing to do. Avoiding peeing in your bed (and your mate if you have one) is a pretty good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 6

Avoid Embarrassment

Noah is the first documented vineyard farmer. According to the Bible, Noah started anew after the great flood by planting a vineyard and making wine. The Bible states Noah was a great man of God and only talks about ONE instance where he had made a mistake...

This particular mistake Noah made was that he got drunk one night and embarrassed himself in front of his sons. His sons looked in his tent in the morning and saw that he was naked. When Noah “awoke from his wine” his son Ham made fun of him. You can read about this incident in Genesis Chapter 9.

I don't want to offend anyone or turn anyone off by getting into a religious belief debate. I'm simply trying to make a point...Isn't it funny that the story which talks about first documented vineyard farmer also states the very first embarrassing incident caused by alcohol? I may not be the “sharpest tool in the shed” but I do see an association here.

I spent more than a decade of my life embarrassing myself in front of my family, as well as the general public, which could have been prevented if I would have learned to just stay sober. I am not talking about doing silly little things that caused me to get red-faced and blush. I'm talking about humiliating myself to the point of incomprehensible demoralization. Not just once, twice, or even several times, but very many times. There are too many times that I have embarrassed myself because of excessive alcohol use to list in full detail, but here are some general examples...

- As a teen, I got busted for being drunk in public and the police called my dad to come pick me up.
- I got so drunk at my wedding reception that I was hitting on girls other than the girl who I just married three hours before. Many friends and family members noticed. (This made for an interesting honeymoon)
- I had the humiliating experience of waking up on my living room floor with 8 policemen and my dad standing over me because apparently I got drunk, blacked out, and called my dad and told him that I was going to commit suicide and then passed out. This happened while I was an adult. A similar situation happened again a couple of years later, but this time the police shot me with pepper pellets because I was passed out on my bed with my hands under my pillow and they thought I was armed. There were several family members outside.

- Having all of my relatives know that I was in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center isn't something one would care advertise.
- Showing up for work and your boss yelling to the other employees, "Don't light a match around Dave...He's flammable."
- I missed Christmas Day at my Mom's house one year because I was "such a mess" and everyone had a pretty good idea why I didn't go. I ended up spending Christmas Day alone in a hotel room where I was currently living.
- Being passed out on a sidewalk out in front of a bar during the day isn't something that you probably want to admit. This is especially true when you wake up to a homeless guy standing over you telling you that you need help.
- Having your dad come visit you at the county jail during a 30-day stay for DUI isn't how sons like to impress their fathers.
- I went to Las Vegas for a trade show with my company and got really drunk the night before the show. My boss came banging on my hotel room door that morning and saw that I was in no condition to work in our booth, so he sent me home.

The painful list can go on and on. These examples of embarrassment which I once faced because of drunkenness could be considered extreme. Just because I had a drinking problem doesn't mean that similar occurrences can't ever happen to those who don't.

Have you ever embarrassed yourself in front of your friends or family because you had too much to drink?

If so, could you name all of the times you were aware that you had embarrassed yourself?

I don't know anyone who likes to be embarrassed. Alcohol causes people to do things, say things, and act in ways they normally wouldn't, if they remained sober. You may not want to wait until you really embarrass yourself before you decide that it may be a good idea to avoid drunkenness. Drunkenness and alcohol go hand-in-hand. Avoiding embarrassment is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 7

Avoid Doing Something Really Stupid

There is a difference between embarrassing yourself and doing something really stupid. The two are closely related, but there is a difference.

Most of us know that alcohol alters judgment. The more you drink, the more your judgment becomes impaired. Not only does alcohol alter your judgment, at certain times it also seems to unleash or release a “demon” inside you that you may or may not be aware even existed. Just for the record, one definition of “demon” is “a persistently tormenting person, force, or passion”.

There was a time when my brother and I were drinking a case of beer. Being a drunken fool, out of nowhere I decided to punch a hole in the wall of our house with my fist. We laughed hysterically to the point where my brother decided to do the same. After the smoke cleared the next day, I was at the hardware store buying several drywall repair kits to fix the holes we had punched in the walls. I didn't think it was very funny then, especially having to spend money on drywall repair kits when I only made close to minimum wage.

Now, what would cause a couple of people to start punching holes in the walls of their house for no reason at all? I have a hard time imagining that I would do anything like this while I was sober. There is just absolutely no logical reason for doing something like this. Alcohol can be “a demon”.

Las Vegas, the gambling capital of the world, gives you free drinks if you are gambling. This isn't a great revelation, as everyone who has been to Vegas probably knows you are offered free drinks if you are gambling. I'd have to say most everyone probably has a basic understanding why Las Vegas gives you free alcohol, but really think about this...

Why do people gamble? Well, people may gamble for several reasons, but to keep it simple let's just say people gamble because of *greed*. Las Vegas knows that the odds of winning are in the houses favor. Most players know that the odds of winning are against them. Now if we mix alcohol and greed, the odds are extremely good that you're going to lose much more money than you intended to lose, or maybe continue to play when you should quit. Even with having just a couple of drinks, it is extremely possible to begin making decisions based on emotion rather than logic. Giving your hard-earned money away to a casino could be considered *not wise*. Giving much more money away than you originally intended to the casino because alcohol impaired your judgment could be considered stupid.

When a cocktail waitress in Las Vegas asks you if you would like a drink, what they are really asking is, “Can we help you impair your judgment so we can take more money than you originally intended to spend?” There's a reason the alcohol is free and it's not because they like you. Gambling can be an addiction of it's own. People make bad decisions on what to play,

how much to bet, and when to stop, even when they are sober...alcohol simply adds fuel to the fire. Casino gambling is dumb but if you're going to gamble, don't drink while your doing it.

Personal morals and standards are compromised when heavily under the influence of alcohol. People can compromise their morals and standards while in a sober state, but they become much, much, much easier to compromise while intoxicated. One of the best examples of this is cheating on your mate or spouse. Someone may have a strong bond with his or her mate and in a sober state might say, "I would NEVER do that!" One thing is for sure, when you start running alcohol through your system in heavy doses, NEVER SAY NEVER! What's really even more interesting is if you compromise your morals and standards while under the influence of alcohol, it becomes easier thereafter to compromise your morals and standards again while sober.

One good example of someone doing something really stupid while drunk is a story that I saw on the news. A bunch of guys were drinking very heavily, and one of the men tried to shoot a beer can off of another man's head with a bow and arrow. So this guy is standing there with a beer can on his head. The arrow being shot missed the beer can and was driven right into his head (by way of one of his eyes). This is a true story. I'd like to think this is something they would not have tried if they were sober. Alcohol has a tendency to give us a false sense of security as this story indicates.

I had an alcohol counselor who told a story about having a false sense of security and doing something stupid while drunk. He said that he was going to a party at a friend's house. When he showed up at the door, there was a big German Shepherd barking at him through the screen door. He said that he refused to enter the house unless the dog was locked in a room or the dog was put in the back yard, as he was terrified of dogs. The people of the house agreed to put the dog in the back yard. As the party went on, the counselor proceeded to get belligerently drunk. By the end of the evening he found himself in the back yard teasing and wrestling with the big dog.

This dog didn't hurt him, but in his mind, teasing and wrestling with a big German Shepherd was an extremely stupid thing to do. This story did take place before he became an alcohol counselor.

Do you know of anyone who has done something really stupid because they were heavily intoxicated?

Really think about this...

Have you ever done something really stupid when you were drunk that you probably would not have done if you were sober?

Most of us do something which could be considered "stupid" from time to time throughout our lives even when we are stone cold sober. Although, when we start running alcohol through our system we increase the odds of doing so. Keeping in touch with reality and making decisions with a clear mind can help prevent you from doing something really stupid. This is a very good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 8

Drunken People are Unattractive

Drunken people are not sexy. Period. Not only are drunken people not sexy, they are outright unattractive. Nobody likes being around a slobbering drunk. I'm sure there were many times I was heavily intoxicated when I thought I was being funny or cute. Maybe to some people I was, but I can guarantee you there were plenty of people who were thinking to themselves "what a bozo".

I was in a nightclub one particular evening and this well-dressed, classy-looking lady was sitting at the bar. All of a sudden out of nowhere, she fell off of her barstool onto the ground. From the ground, she sat up and grabbed the leg of the barstool, pulled herself halfway up, and then fell back over. This time she fell flat on her back and her legs went flying in the air (she was wearing a skirt). Her eyes told the story...she was smashed. Security guards were there within seconds picking her up off the ground and escorting her off. God only knows what she was drinking and how much she drank. This well-dressed, classy-looking lady wasn't so classy-looking anymore. As a matter of fact she looked pretty pathetic. I felt sorry for her.

One year I went to this club for New Year's Eve. It was really crowded in there, so I went outside to get some fresh air. I walked out the back door to find this lady gagging and throwing up all over the place. She wasn't even puking in the bushes; she just kind of leaned forward and was throwing up on the concrete so the puke was splattering all over the place and on her shoes. She was wearing a dress that she probably purchased exclusively for the New Year's celebration in an attempt to look attractive. I'm here to tell you that she looked far from attractive. On one hand it was pretty funny, but on the other hand it really was pretty sad.

There was a time when I was in a nice little karaoke club. I was pretty "tipsy" and I submitted a song to sing. At the time, I would never think of getting in front of a bunch of strangers while I was sober to sing a song. By the time it became my turn to sing, I was pretty "loaded". When I was up there singing, I remember slurring the words to the song pretty badly and noticing the expressions on people's faces. They were turning to one another grinning and chuckling. When I was finished, the audience gave me a small "courtesy clap". I'm sure I looked real sexy up there slurring the words to the song, singing off key, and singing words when I wasn't supposed to. I left the club immediately after that song never to return. I am not a singer, but I would have done a much better job if I wasn't scared to do it sober. I hope when I get to Heaven, God doesn't make me watch a videotape of that particular performance.

These types of examples of self-induced unattractiveness happen throughout the world hundreds of times every day. It wouldn't surprise me if these types of examples took place *thousands of times* every day.

Some drunken people may appear attractive or funny to another drunken person. As they say, “like attracts like”, “healthy attracts healthy”, and “sick attracts sick”. Although as a general rule to live by, if you would like to really impress someone, having bloodshot-watery eyes, slurring your words, smelling like a brewery, and acting like a fool is probably not the image you want to portray. This applies not only at bars and nightclubs, but also at a wide variety of other social events, as well as spending an evening with your spouse or mate.

You don’t have to get belligerently drunk to appear unattractive. It doesn’t take drinking much alcohol to get to the point where you may lose qualities and attributes which makes you attractive. This could range from getting loud and obnoxious to acting stupid.

Do you think you have ever been in a position where you may not have looked your best, or portrayed an image that was unattractive because you had too much to drink?

Drunken people are not attractive. Period. Looking and acting your best while sending a positive message to others is a good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 9

“Blackouts” are Possible

What is a simple definition of a “blackout”? A blackout is a period of time in which memory is not stored in the brain. This is due to one or several different chemical effects alcohol has on the brain in direct correlation with blood-alcohol content.

A blackout does not mean that you *lose* your memory. A blackout means the events taking place *are not being stored* into memory. A blackout timeframe can range from several minutes to several hours, even to several days, depending on the person and the circumstances.

It’s an **EXTREMELY SCARY FEELING** to wake up in the morning and wondering...

- “How did I get home last night?”
- “I wonder where my car is?”
- “Who are you?”
- “How much money did I spend?”
- “How did I end up in jail?”
- “How did I end up in the hospital?”
- “Did I hurt anybody?”

It’s just as scary to hear from others what you may have done, which would cause you to ask...

- “Did I really do that?”
- “Did I really say that?”

Hearing the details of an event or situation from others may cause you to say...

- “I can’t believe I said that!”
- “I can’t believe I did that!”

Personally, I don’t believe I started experiencing total blackouts until I was in my mid twenties. Total blackouts meaning that many hours may pass and you have absolutely no recollection of any events which took place during that time. Although, once I started having total blackouts they occurred often when I would drink heavy...which was often.

There are also the times when you may remember *some* of the details of a situation, which will leave you to wonder *exactly* what happened. Here’s an example...

When I was a teenager, I really wanted to go see the rock band “Bon Jovi”. We got tickets. I had never been to a concert before and I was really excited about going to see this band. We drank heavily before we even left for the concert and we drank heavily on the way to the concert. I remember very few details of the concert itself. I remember standing in line to buy more beer,

and I remember we had bad seats. I have a vague memory of what the stage looked like. That's about it. I feel like I cheated myself. Because I really have no clear memory of hearing or seeing the band play, it's as though it really never happened. To this day, I wish that I would have stayed sober so that I would have a good memory of my first concert. What a shame.

Total blackouts are really scary. I've ended up in some pretty strange places as the result of a total blackout. I have literally spent days trying to figure out how I got myself into certain situations never being able to come up with a logical explanation. One second I was feeling fine and having a good time, and the next thing I know I've awoken the following day in some strange place. The events which took place from the time the blackout started until the time I passed out were not being stored into memory.

There are different theories related to blackouts, but I am led to believe that you do not have to be an alcoholic or have "a drinking problem" to experience a blackout. My theory is simply "everybody is different". This meaning...

- People who are not alcohol dependant may experience blackouts.
- People who drink heavy and often may not experience blackouts.
- People may get drunk often and only sometimes experience blackouts.
- People who may drink only a little alcohol may experience a blackout.
- People may experience a blackout and not know it.

One thing is certain...if you don't drink you will not experience a self-induced blackout.

Have you ever experienced a blackout that you are aware of?

Have you ever been told you did something while you were drunk that you don't remember doing?

Have you ever done anything in a blackout that you regretted?

If you have experienced a blackout, you may want to take a good close look at your drinking habits. If you have never experienced a blackout, this doesn't mean that you never will.

You don't have to be an alcoholic to experience a blackout. I can't begin to state how dangerous blackouts can be. One reason that blackouts are so dangerous is that you never see it coming on. One minute you may be having a great time and the next minute the lights go out. It's that quick. Hopefully you will never have to suffer consequences for something you do while in a blackout. Just because you can't remember doing or saying something doesn't mean that you cannot be held accountable for you actions. Maintaining control, taking responsibility for your actions, and being able to remember the events that take place in your life is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 10

Can be Habit Forming

I wasn't always an alcoholic. I don't believe that I was "born" an alcoholic. I didn't wake up one morning and say, "I'm going to be an alcoholic!" I'm not even exactly sure of the exact time, or year, I became an alcoholic. It just seemed to happen that way over time.

The best way I know how to explain this is to use the "life-garden parable". The "life-garden parable" may help you realize the person you are today probably is not as important as the person that you are becoming day by day.

If you plant seeds in a garden, it's absurd to think that you can walk out the next day to discover the seeds have blossomed into big beautiful plants or trees. It doesn't happen this way. These seeds need to be kept watered and require sunlight in order for them to grow. With the proper care the seeds will begin to germinate and grow over time. Weeds need to be pulled to maintain the beauty of the garden. Some seeds require more time to grow than others. Also, you can't plant an apple seed and expect a lemon tree to grow. If you plant an apple seed, expect an apple tree. If you plant a cherry seed, expect a cherry tree.

Life is just like a garden. The things you do, the habits you have, the music you listen to, your social activities, your friends, and the things you learn are all seeds in "life's garden". I planted some bad seeds in my life garden when I was young, and I didn't even know that I had planted them. These bad seeds received special attention throughout the years and I came to realize later in life that I had blossomed into an alcoholic.

I didn't drink everyday. I started out only drinking on the weekends because I liked "to party". Then I started drinking out of boredom...then at social gatherings...then at sporting events...then I drank to celebrate. I started drinking when I was sad or depressed. It got to the point I would avoid attending functions or gatherings where I knew that I wasn't going to be able to drink. I didn't realize this at the time, and if anyone would have pointed any of this out to me, I probably would have said they were crazy. This didn't happen consciously, nor did it happen overnight. These were seeds that I planted in my life garden and these seeds grew.

One ritual I started very young was going out to a bar or nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights. I started this habit well before I turned 21. Over the years, this became such a ritual that if I didn't go out on Friday or Saturday night, I felt as though I was missing out on something and would consider it a bad weekend. This is the person I had molded myself into. I had no idea that that were a million other things I could do which were much more healthy and fulfilling.

“Weekends only” drinking can be habit forming in itself. You might ask (as I did at one point), “What else is there to do?” The only way I can answer this is to recommend you discipline yourself to refrain from weekend drinking for 3 to 6 months and you’ll be amazed! There’s a whole world out there and it seems as though your choices become unlimited. You will begin to appreciate your own personal capacity for creativity.

One way to describe this thinking is if you were to stand in a field full of cow poop, you would eventually get used to the smell. The longer you stay in the field of cow poop, the more normal the smell would become. Once you step out of the field of cow poop, you then realize that you were not in the best of circumstances.

One of the funniest cartoons I have seen in a long time was in our local newspaper. There was a guy standing on a street corner drinking a bottle of wine. Another guy turns and looks at the drinking man and says, “That is not one of the seven habits of highly effective people.”

Again, just because you drink alcohol does not mean that you are going to develop a drinking problem. Although, I am living proof it is very possible. Not only is it very possible, it’s very common. There is a reason you could be in just about any city in the United States and find several Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Larger cities may have up to 50 different meetings going on in a single day! For the most part, the people who attend these meetings are just the people who have admitted that they have a drinking problem and are seeking help. Think about all of the people in a community who do have a problem, but aren’t willing to admit it, accept it, or even care. The numbers can be astounding.

Getting drunk is planting a bad seed in your life garden. Do you plant this seed in your garden?

There is a difference between drinking alcohol and abusing it. Both can be habit forming. In a perfect world, there shouldn’t be a problem with coming home from work and having a couple beers, or having a cocktail or two on a Saturday night. Our world is far from perfect. Alcohol use can very well lead to alcohol abuse. Life is tough enough as it is without developing destructive habits. Drunkenness and its sedative affects can be very habit forming. Drunkenness also has the capacity to assist in taking your life down paths that are unimaginable. This is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 11

Drunkenness Can Contribute to a Bad Reputation

It really doesn't take much to develop a bad reputation. It's easier to ruin a good reputation and develop a bad reputation, than it is to maintain a good one. This can apply in our professional lives, as well as our personal or social lives.

I worked with a guy who really wasn't a bad guy. He was in a management position and for the most part, in my opinion, did his job well. This guy would ask you how your day was, how your family was, what you did over the weekend, and make it seem as though you were best friends. He did this with everybody. Although, once in a while he had a tendency to be one of the biggest jerks I (or anyone else) knew. Therefore, the guy had a big reputation of being a big jerk. When I saw him walking down the hallway, I thought to myself... "jerk". All of the other people who came into contact with this guy probably thought the same thing. Like I said, he was only a jerk a small percentage of the time, but he still had this reputation. Unless he goes a very long period of time without being a jerk, he will continue to have this reputation.

My dad used to tell me, "If you look like a duck, and you walk like a duck, you must be a duck". In most cases, I'd have to agree. I've known people whom I have worked with over the years that used to consistently come to work late with bloodshot eyes and smelling like stale alcohol. Well, in my mind, if you consistently come to work late with bloodshot eyes and smell like stale alcohol...you must be a drunk, or have a drinking problem. It's that simple. This is the reputation these people had. Not just with me, but also with everyone else who knew them. I'm not saying these were bad people. I am saying they had developed a reputation of "someone who hit the bottle a little too often", and they would have to go a long period of time without showing any signs of alcohol use before that reputation will change.

I used to work at a place when I was in my early to mid twenties where I had gained the reputation of a guy who did his job really well and worked hard. At this job, I also gained the reputation as being a drunk. I made it known to everyone that I liked to party. I used to go drinking after work on a regular basis with the guys, and talk about all of the wild things that may have happened over the weekend. Not to mention that I, myself, used to come to work late with bloodshot eyes and smell like stale alcohol. One time I came back from lunch and a co-worker asked me, "Hey Dave, what did you have to drink for lunch?" What's funny about this is at that time I had never drank on my lunch hour. Even though I had never drank on my lunch hour, I had the reputation of one that might.

Because I had the reputation of a guy who used to go out drinking during the week, I could never call in sick because everyone would think that I was just too hung over to make it in to work. Most of the time they were right. I did go into work on days when I really should have stayed home because I was sick, but I didn't want anyone to think that I was hung over again.

If you're in the process of trying to climb the corporate ladder, your reputation is very important. In most industries, you DO NOT want the reputation as a drunk. You don't have to be a drunk to have the reputation as a drunk. Also, just because you may wear a tie to work or dress nice, this doesn't mean that you can't pick up this bad reputation. You don't necessarily want the reputation of a "prude", "a stick in the mud", or someone that doesn't like to have fun, but you sure don't want the reputation of being a drunk (even if you do your job better than anybody else). It's very possible to get denied pay raises and promotions if you have the reputation as a lush, a person who makes bad choices every so often, or isn't reliable 100% of the time.

At my most recent place of employment I have the reputation of someone who simply does not drink. Several people know that I have had a past issue with alcohol, because I'm not ashamed to talk about it with people who I'm close to. On the other hand, having a past drinking problem isn't something you may want to publicize in the work place. Over the course of time, I've been slightly ridiculed by some people for not drinking at company parties, but nine times out of ten, the people who I am ridiculed by for not drinking are not those who I want to impress anyway. I have learned to joke and have a good time without it and nobody *really* notices or even cares that I'm not drinking.

You don't have to drink or get drunk to gain a bad reputation, but alcohol sure does have the power to contribute to one. Even if you have never shown signs alcoholism, you can still develop a bad reputation by doing or saying something while under the influence of alcohol which you wouldn't do or say sober. This can very easily give someone the wrong impression of you.

What kind of reputation would you like to have?

Do you think this is the *actual* reputation you have?

Has alcohol ever contributed to a reputation you wish you did not have?

Not too many people who I know would like to have the reputation of "possibly having a drinking problem". You can develop a bad reputation by doing or saying something you may regret while drinking or being drunk. Maintaining a good reputation amongst our professional colleagues, friends, and family is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 12

Getting Drunk is Unhealthy

Today, we are a “health-conscious society” more than ever. Everywhere you look you find companies, products, and advertising campaigns which promote a healthier lifestyle. It seems as though there are thousands of companies who promote and sell nutritional dietary supplements, exercise equipment, exercise videos, gym memberships, and diet books. Have you ever seen a drunk person in an advertisement for one these products? That may be a ridiculous question but think about it. A healthy lifestyle and drunkenness are as good of a mix as oil and water.

A medical belief concerning alcohol and heart disease states small percentages of alcohol consumed on a regular basis may help decrease the chance of heart disease. It doesn't say drunkenness on a regular basis may help decrease the chances of heart disease. There is a very big difference between the two. Even when the recommendation is made to consume small amounts of alcohol for a health related issue; there is an extremely long list of warnings that go along with it. Personally, I must abstain from any alcohol use, even in small doses. Alcohol has a very funky effect on my body which causes me to want more. Alcohol didn't always have this effect on me, but as my alcohol abuse increased my body began to react differently to it. Consult your physician and use common sense before attempting to use alcohol in small percentages as a tool to help prevent heart disease, as there are numerous circumstances in which you should not do this.

I do believe it is commonly known that getting drunk has an adverse affect on the liver and that your liver is essential for life. The liver eventually breaks down most alcohol a person drinks. Alcohol-Induced Liver Disease (ALD) is a major cause of illness and death in the United States. In the United States, cirrhosis of the liver is the seventh leading cause of death among young and middle-age adults. *Approximately 10,000 to 24,000 deaths from cirrhosis may be attributed to alcohol consumption each year.

Military personnel are required to pass periodic a physical fitness test which consists of running, push-ups, and sit-ups. When I was in the Army, my friends and I drank an ocean of beer. During a certain period, a couple of friends of mine and I failed our physical fitness tests. We attributed this failure to all of the beer we had been drinking, as we were overweight. We then decided to quit drinking beer and start drinking scotch whiskey because we were under the impression that scotch whiskey had fewer calories than beer. On an average, a 12-ounce regular beer has anywhere from 125-200 calories. An ounce and a half of scotch whiskey contains roughly 100 calories. Let's just say we continued to battle the “beer belly” and “love handles”.

Even if you don't drink on a regular basis, drinking heavily on a specific occasion tends to make a person look a little bloated. You probably won't notice it right away, but you may notice it a day or two after the “party”. This varies from person to person, but as a general observation, it's something I've noticed in others and myself over the years.

One of the most drastic physical changes I see in people is the general overall healthy appearance of someone who drank on a regular basis and then quit drinking altogether. Granted, this radical change in appearance doesn't happen overnight, but over the course of several months the changes can be astounding. I can't really describe any specific features, or any specific look, but in many cases these people don't even look like the same person. I'm sure there are more, but I believe a couple of reasons for this great change is the fact that alcohol depletes the body of valuable nutrients and alcohol also depresses the body's immune system. There really is a noticeable difference in one's physical appearance who abstains from drinking alcohol for lengthy periods of time. This is a good thing.

In today's health conscious society, you can spend a ton of money on products which may help you look and feel like a better person. One of the very best things you can do for your personal health and physical appearance is not to get drunk. This is a very good reason to stay sober.

*Alcohol induced liver disease statistic is from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Publications Distribution Center

Reason # 13

Driving Under the Influence and the Law

I don't want to preach. Nobody likes to be preached at. I didn't want to listen to anyone who was "preaching" at me. When people "preached" at me, I felt as though people took me for a stupid kid. I wasn't a stupid kid; I don't want anyone reading this to think this was written for "stupid people". I do want people to read this and to possibly learn something. I then would like people to make their own personal decisions in day-to-day life based on what they already know and what they may have learned. I don't want to preach.

A DUI (driving under the influence) is a very serious offense. It didn't used to be a serious offense several years ago, but it is today. A DUI used to be treated by the law as a minor traffic infraction. Today, if you are charged with driving under the influence, you've got yourself in big trouble.

We all know that alcohol is present at countless social events, and nobody really *plans* on getting a DUI. Although, everyone should be aware of the fact that it doesn't take much alcohol in your system to make it illegal for you to operate a motor vehicle. The blood alcohol content (BAC) legal limit in most states is .08%, which is roughly the equivalent of consuming two beers within an hour (based upon a male who weighs 150 lbs.) That's all it takes. Only two beers consumed within an hour and you can go to jail if you get behind the wheel of a car. You may not consider yourself to be drunk or impaired, but if you get pulled over by a policeman who smells alcohol and he gives you a breathalyzer test, chances are you are going to jail for driving under the influence.

The consequences for driving under the influence vary from state to state, county to county, and judge to judge. Even if you have never been in trouble with the law before or had any prior DUI's, this is what you can pretty much expect if you get a DUI (in the state of California as of 2001) assuming you don't get in an accident or hurt anyone...

- Spend the night in Jail
- Pay a \$1,200.00 fine
- Pay expensive attorney or public defender fees
- Suspension of your driver's license for three months
- Be put on informal probation for the period of 3 years
- 3-5 days community service (for example: picking up trash on the freeway)
- Mandatory three-month drinking driver program that you must attend once a week for a few hours. This is a classroom type setting that nobody wants to attend. It's also an expensive program. You must submit your proof of completion certificate to the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) in order to get your driver's license back.
- Attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting (or self help meeting) once a week for three months.

- Get a nice little letter in the mail from your car insurance company stating they have either cancelled your car insurance policy or have dramatically increased your monthly payment. The DUI stays on your driving record for 7 years, and you will pay astronomical car insurance rates the entire time

I am yet to meet a person who got a DUI after 1993 that hasn't had to deal with every single one of the consequences listed above.

I started drinking and driving from the time that I had a driver's license at age 16. I drove under the influence of alcohol quite often, and never had to suffer any consequences for doing so until I was 23 years old. I got away with it for so long that I became your typical person who believed that I would never get in trouble with the law for driving under the influence of alcohol. Getting a DUI was nothing more than "a myth" to me. I believed that going to jail for drunk driving was something that wouldn't or couldn't ever happen to *me*. I went through a period of time where I thought I was bulletproof. I had gone through sobriety checkpoints heavily under the influence of alcohol and got away with it. I've been pulled over several times by the police while under the influence and they never detected I was heavily intoxicated. One time, I was actually pulled over by a policeman while I was really drunk (and I even had a bunch of empty beer cans in the back seat of my car) and I was able to talk my way out of a ticket and going to jail. Like I said, I thought I was bulletproof. Eventually my poor decision-making and erratic behavior came full circle. It took nearly 10 years for my luck to run out, and when it did run out, it ran out completely.

My first DUI came in January of 1994. I was 23 years old. During the time that I had to deal with the previously stated consequences, I felt as though people who committed more serious crimes had to suffer consequences much less severe. I had no idea that I would have to go through so much turmoil for just getting pulled over by a policeman after having a few cocktails. I was an extremely bitter person at that time. I had an extraordinarily difficult time accepting and understanding how the courts could suspend my driver's license for three months, and expect me to remain a functional member of society. At the time, it seemed as though I was going through hell.

I'm what the court refers to as a "multiple offender". You would think that I should have learned my lesson the first time, but I didn't. The consequences of DUI for multiple offenders are much, much, more severe. As of January 1997 in the State of California, if you get two DUI's within a seven-year period you must serve a mandatory 30 days in the county jail. I have had to serve two 30-day sentences for DUI related offenses along with 18 month drinking driver programs, 18-month drivers license suspensions, along with numerous other consequences. One consequence was to have an alcohol breathalyzer installed on my vehicle for 18 months, and provide proof to the court that it was installed. This is a device you have to blow into before you start your vehicle. If the device detects any alcohol, the car won't start. It cost me about \$70.00 a month just to have this device on my car. What was really funny about this is that I had a court order to have this breathalyzer installed on my vehicle, but my driver's license was suspended for 18 months, which means that I wasn't supposed to be driving anyway. These were miserable times for me, but it was my own fault.

On one particular occasion, a judge was going to sentence me to 30 days in the county jail for multiple DUI's within a seven-year timeframe, and before he did, he asked me if I had anything to say. I thought that if I admitted to having a drinking problem the judge might show me some leniency (even though at this time I did not believe that I had a drinking problem). So I said, "Your Honor, I don't believe that I should have to go to jail." The judge then asked me, "Mr. Eugene, why do you believe this?" I replied with, "Your Honor, I believe that jail is for criminals. I don't believe that I am a criminal, but I do believe that I am an alcoholic. Therefore, I feel that I should not have to go to jail." There was silence in the courtroom, and the judge appeared to be in deep thought. For a split second, I thought the judge was going to let me off the hook. After pondering my statement for what seemed to be an eternity, the judge replied with, "Mr. Eugene, you are not being prosecuted for being an alcoholic. You are being prosecuted for operating a motor vehicle while under the influence alcohol, which is a crime. Therefore, you are a criminal. I sentence you to 30 days in the county jail. Mr. Eugene, follow the instructions of the bailiff."

The point that I'm trying to make is that drinking alcohol is not a crime, but driving under the influence of alcohol is. Nobody is exempt. As a matter of fact, during one of my visits through one of the drinking driver programs, I met someone who looked as though they really didn't belong there. It was 72 year-old man who reminded me of my grandpa. He had never been in trouble with the law his entire life. He just happened to be at a bridge party where he had a few drinks. On his way home, he didn't come to a complete stop at a stop sign and was pulled over by a police officer. The 72 year old man was taken to jail for driving under the influence of alcohol and suffered all of the consequences the rest of us did.

You've been reading about some of the consequences you have to suffer that go along with getting caught for driving under the influence. At the time I was dealing with all of that "stuff", I felt the consequences for driving under the influence were way too strict. Now, after it's all been said and done and that part of my life is over with, I'm really grateful that the courts are so strict on drunk driving. The fact that I did have to suffer such severe consequences eventually played an important role in me "cleaning up my act".

Then there are the innocent people who suffer the ultimate consequence because someone else decided to drink and drive. This isn't fair at all. You hear this on the news all the time, "Last night there was a car accident and two people were killed. A suspected drunk driver was the cause of the accident." It really is a tragedy when this happens. People's lives are cut short because of an irresponsible individual who more than likely did not realize that his drunkenness would kill someone that night. My heart goes out to the families who have had a loved one taken by a drunk driver, and there are a lot of them. *Approximately 25,000 people a year are killed in alcohol related accidents. The fact that I never hurt or killed anyone while I drove under the influence as often as I did wasn't luck...it was a miracle, and for that I am very grateful.

On September 11th 2001, the United States of America was a victim of a horrific terrorist act. After the attack, Americans seemed to have a renewed sense of patriotism toward our country. Our feelings change and we tend to alter our behavior when tragedy strikes our lives. I had to suffer consequences for drinking and driving **BEFORE** I altered my behavior. When it comes to drinking and driving, please do not wait for a tragedy to take place in your life before you change your behavior.

As I have said before, when we start drinking our decision-making is altered. The more we drink, the more bad decisions we tend to make. Making the decision to try to make it home after a night of partying could very well prove to wreck your life or someone else's. This decision could wreck your entire life in an instant. One minute you're "happy-go-lucky", the next minute you're either dead or you're in jail facing charges of involuntary manslaughter. It is very possible that if you drink and drive this can happen to you. This is coming from a guy who thought he was bulletproof. I know. This is an excellent reason just to stay sober and it's very, very, important that you understand this. If you think you're exempt, or too hip, slick, and cool to get a DUI or have something else terribly go wrong while driving under the influence, then you need to read this chapter again. If you are the type of person to ignore warnings such as this and you decide to roll the dice, don't say you weren't warned. If you are big enough to drink and drive you are also big enough to suffer the consequences when they happen. My prayer for you is that you exercise good judgment. Just stay sober and you won't have to worry it.

*Statistic provided by the United States Department of Transportation

Reason # 14

Drunk Drivers Don't Only Kill

I had just got home from work on August 8th 1995 when I played the messages on my answering machine. One of the messages was from my brother telling me to call him as soon as I got in. I could tell in his voice there was something very wrong. I called him back and said, "Who died?" He responded with, "Nobody died...yet." I then asked him to explain. My brother proceeded to tell me that Jerry, our step father and very close friend to both of us, was hit by a drunk driver on his way to work at 6:10 AM earlier that day and was currently at the Scripps Memorial Hospital Intensive Care Unit in very critical condition.

I drove to the hospital where I found several family members and friends waiting to find out something from the doctors. We were told that Jerry had suffered multiple injuries including a shattered pelvis and hip, fractured ankle, a punctured lung, internal bleeding, massive head trauma, and that his chances for survival were shaky at best.

I really thought it was unusual that he was hit by a drunk driver at 6:10 AM. Most drunk driving incidences happen between 10:00 PM and 2:00 AM. Apparently, the drunk driver was up all night "partying" and was on his way home. The drunk driver had run a red light at an estimated speed of 55 MPH and rammed his 1985 Oldsmobile Cutlass into the side of Jerry's vehicle while he was going through the intersection. The drunk driver walked away from the accident with very minor injuries. The drunk driver was sentenced to the state maximum of only 3 years in jail of which he only served half of his sentence and then was released.

Jerry spent eight weeks in a coma, which he eventually pulled out of. After over 26 hours on the operating table and many months of rehabilitation, Jerry recovered but did not make a full recovery. Jerry was left with permanent optical nerve damage, which causes double vision, and permanent peroneal palsy of the left leg (better know as drop foot). He also suffers from various body aches and pains which are associated with this accident, and will for the rest of his life.

To me personally, this is not just another drunk driver story where someone got hurt. Jerry stared death in the face and came very close to passing on. If he would have died, I have absolutely no idea where I would be or what I would be doing today. Jerry has been there for me as a true friend through several personal issues that I've had to deal with since his accident and recovery. As previously stated, the accident happened in August of 1995. In June of 2000, Jerry introduced me to a fine young lady named Kristin who is now my wife and life-long partner whom I love dearly. Like I said, if that drunk driver would have taken his life, I have no idea what my personal status would be like today.

I'm ashamed of several things that I've done in my life. One thing I'm ashamed of is that one of my DUI's came after Jerry's accident. After Jerry's accident, I told myself that I would never drive drunk ever again...and I was very sincere. I had no plans to quit drinking altogether at that time, but I made a firm resolution never to *drive* drunk again. I don't believe that I drove drunk

for several months after that. If I went out to a bar and had too much to drink I would make arrangements to take a taxi, or have someone else drive.

One night, while at a bar and under the influence of alcohol, I guess I talked myself into thinking that it was too inconvenient to take a taxi. Not to mention the hassle of coming back the following day to retrieve my car. I also convinced myself that I was in good enough condition that I could make it home without getting in an accident or getting pulled over by a cop. Well, I made it home fine. Since I made it home fine that time, it became easier to do it again, and again. It got back to the point where taking a taxi was really not an option. Eventually my behavior and poor decision-making came full circle, and I was pulled over by a Highway Patrolman for speeding with a blood alcohol content of more than twice the legal limit. I ended up serving 30 days in the county jail for that particular incident. At the time, I thought that my life had come to an end, but serving the 30 days in jail was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I thank God that I didn't ever hurt anyone while I was driving. It really is a miracle that I didn't.

I had seen first hand what drunk driving could do to someone else. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, nobody thinks that anything this tragic can happen to them, whether you are the victim, or the perpetrator. I thought this myself at one time. Decision-making is drastically altered and your body's motor skills are impaired when under the influence of alcohol. Please do not take the attitude that "Nothing like that will ever happen to me"...because it can. If you make it home after driving drunk, consider yourself lucky. If you continue to drive drunk, I can assure you that the law of averages will eventually catch up to you. If you must go out and "party", make sure that you pre-arrange for a sober person to drive you home. If there isn't anyone available to take you home, take a taxi. If you can't afford a taxi, then you can't afford to go out. If you drive drunk, the chances are good that you may not be doing much "partying" in future.

Jerry was a victim. He didn't do anything wrong. He was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. A drunk driver changed his life forever. To the drunk driver, Jerry was just a stranger. Even though a person may be a stranger to you, a stranger is the most important person in the world to somebody else out there.

As they say in Alcoholics Anonymous, "Alcohol is cunning, baffling, and powerful". Drunk drivers do kill, but drunk drivers don't only kill. It's very possible to drastically change someone else's life forever for the worse. This is one of the best reasons (if not the best reason) just to stay sober.

Reason # 15

Alcohol and Violence

There is ample evidence of a close association between alcohol consumption and violent behavior. I am not a violent person by nature, but there have been times when I have displayed violent behavior while under the influence of alcohol. Today, I do not drink alcohol and so the only time that I can see myself becoming violent is if my family was being threatened. I believe that I can make this statement because I have never displayed any sort of violent behavior in my life while I was 100% sober. The fact that I don't make a habit of "hanging out" in places where there is heavy drinking taking place, makes me much less susceptible to becoming a victim of violence, or being assaulted.

Alcohol contributes to violence in a variety of ways. It intensifies anger, jealousy, and depression. Alcohol has been described as a 'disinhibitor' which increases one's aggression, and decreases the capacity for conflict resolution, which leads to making decisions based on "pickled" emotions rather than sound logic.

There have been numerous studies which have resulted in what seems like a never-ending list of statistics that associate alcohol with domestic violence and violent crimes such as rape, murder, armed robbery and various types of assault. Instead of listing several pages of statistics which link alcohol and various types of violence, I have chosen to state only one statistic that I found to summarize the alcohol/violence association...

- **According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, alcohol is involved in two-thirds of murders and assaults. More simply put, every time an assault or murder takes place, alcohol is involved 2 out of 3 times.**

When the term assault is used, this would include domestic violence as well. My wife was in a previous long-term relationship where she was the victim of domestic violence. She says that she was never hit or beaten up by this person while he was sober. Every time an incident took place it was while her mate was heavily under the influence of alcohol. My wife said that most of the time, the day following the incident, her mate did not remember hitting. This may be true, but it is no excuse. Many people believe drunkenness excuses violent behavior (not that my wife believes this). Even if a person is in an alcohol induced "black-out" state, they need to be held accountable for their actions.

Since the mental frame of mind, physical properties (such as genetics), and social circumstances are different with every person, there is really no specific formula that can measure when alcohol will assist in initiating an act of violence. Studies have shown it does not require a large amount of alcohol to "trigger" someone into becoming violent or react violently to certain circumstances. Heavy drinking is more likely to initiate violence, but as little as one or two drinks may initiate violent behavior.

Earlier, I mentioned that fights breaks out in bars very frequently, which would explain the popular term “bar fight”. Fighting and other forms of violent behavior take place just about everywhere there are large groups of people and a heavy consumption of alcohol...sporting events, concerts, etc. Fighting amongst friends at small parties can also be common where there is heavy drinking.

Have you ever become violent while you were under the influence of alcohol?

Do you know anyone who has become violent while they were under the influence of alcohol?

If you have been around a fair amount of people who have been drinking heavily during your life, chances are that you or someone you know has displayed some form of violent behavior while under alcohol’s influence. If you watch the news, or read the morning newspaper, it’s fairly easy to see we live in violent society. Alcohol plays a big part of the violence which takes place in our society. It sure would be interesting to know just how much less violent our society would be if there was no such thing as alcohol.

It can take as little as one bad decision to mess up your entire life or someone else’s. We said that alcohol is involved in 2 out of 3 murders and assaults. Avoiding the disinhibiting effects of alcohol, being able to resolve conflicts, and to deal with adverse feelings and emotions with a sound mind without resorting to violence is an excellent reason just to stay sober.

Reason # 16

Drunkenness Stunts Emotional Growth

When I was a kid I lacked self-confidence and I had an inferiority complex. I felt different than the other kids. I felt like “I wasn’t good enough”. To this day, I can’t figure out *why* I felt different than the other kids. I just felt like I never “fit in”. I’m sure there is an infinite number of kids who have, or had, felt similar feelings. These feelings of low self-esteem and inferiority followed me into my teens and even into my late twenties.

When I was a young teen I discovered alcohol. All the popular kids in school talked about “partying”, and when I started drinking, alcohol gave me the feeling that I finally fit in. When I drank, the feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem went away. Alcohol gave me a false sense of confidence in social situations that I had never felt before. Alcohol gave me a false sense of security which I eventually had come to rely upon. Alcohol also gave me a sense of identity, as I could drink more than most of the other of the kids that I hung out with. I finally felt like I was “somebody”.

I didn’t know this at the time, but I used alcohol to suppress emotional feelings in an attempt to feel better about myself. Instead of *dealing* with various feelings, learning to accept myself for who I was, and building my self-confidence in a sober state, I used alcohol to “medicate” myself, which resulted in “stunting my emotional growth”. This is similar to taking an aspirin for a headache. The aspirin may relieve the headache, but the aspirin did not cure the reason you got the headache to begin with.

What do I mean by “emotional growth”? All of us have been in situations where we didn’t feel 100% comfortable. Let’s use starting a new job for example. Prior to the first day on the job one might have some “fears of the unknown”, and may have feelings or thoughts like, “What if I can’t do the job”, “What if I mess something up”, “Maybe I’m not good enough to do this job”, or “What if the other employees don’t like me”. Starting a new job can be a little frightening to a lot of us. Once the new job is started, as the days go by, normally we become more comfortable and our self-confidence grows. The original fears we may have had just before starting the new job no longer exist. These negative feelings were “dealt” with by showing up to work and facing some fears or insecurities that we may have had. This is one very small example of emotional growth.

We all have to deal with new circumstances, negative circumstances, and negative feelings in our lives all of the time. The way that we deal with new circumstances, negative circumstances, and negative feelings in our lives determines where we are on the “emotional growth scale”. Generally this is referred to as “maturity”. I don’t like using “maturity” to describe emotional growth because maturity is too broad of a term where people may take the power of the meaning for granted.

I've stated previously that we basically drink for one of two reasons: 1) to be sociable, and 2) to alter our state of consciousness. When we drink to alter our state of consciousness, we are stunting our emotional growth because we are not dealing with the thoughts or emotions that we may be experiencing at that time. I like to refer using alcohol to alter your state of consciousness as "**checking out**". Remember that alcohol is an "emotional disinhibitor".

When I drank heavily, I thought I was just a person who liked to go out and party. Later on I figured out one of the main reasons I used to go out to bars and get drunk often was because I was single and I had a fear of being alone. Subconsciously, I didn't want to deal with the feelings and emotions which are associated with being alone. I had been suppressing feelings of that nature with alcohol for so long that I did not know how to *deal* with those particular feelings other than to "check out".

My personal heavy drinking habits got to the point where I couldn't deal with any emotions or feelings, happy or sad, without suppressing them with alcohol. Subconsciously, if I didn't want to deal with a particular feeling or emotion I would simply "check out". My "coper" was broken, or my ability to cope with some of life's everyday circumstances so I would "check out" often. Other than going to work, I subconsciously tried to avoid going anywhere (on a social level) that didn't serve alcohol. There wasn't a whole lot of emotional growth during those years of my life. In general, females tend to display their emotions more than males. I had a friend once tell me that I was a 26-year old male with the emotions of a 14-year old female.

It took an extended period of time of sobriety (and some therapy) before I became 100% comfortable in my own skin. I'm a perfectionist in an imperfect world, and I needed to learn the true meaning of acceptance. I needed to learn how to accept people and circumstances for whom and what they were without "checking out". Today, I am able to handle new circumstances, negative circumstances, and negative feelings without using alcohol to try to deal with them. I may not always respond appropriately to these situations but I do grow emotionally each time I *deal* with negative situations or emotions. This enables me to better handle situations of the same nature the next time they arise in my life. This doesn't mean that I claim to be perfect because I'm far from it. I just strive to become *better than I was*.

Not everyone abuses alcohol the way that I did (thank God). Although, a lot of us do drink to alter our state of consciousness when we're "not O.K." with certain circumstances. Maybe you've been invited to a Bar-B-Q where you don't know very many people and you feel uncomfortable until you have a couple of drinks first.

Maybe you've had a terrible day at work and you're not in the best of spirits so you pour yourself a couple of drinks to feel better.

Maybe it's Friday night and you don't have a date and so you drink a few beers to ease the pain of thinking everybody else in the world is out having a great time except you.

Maybe you've recently had a loved one pass away and you find yourself drinking more often than normal to ease the pain of your loss.

Maybe you're bored, so you go up to the local bar to have a few beers.

Maybe you're ashamed of something you've done, so you have a few drinks to try to forget about it.

Maybe you're at a party and everyone else is drinking, so to avoid being different, you decide to have a few drinks "to be sociable".

Maybe you're on an airplane and have a fear of flying, so you have a couple of drinks to ease your nervousness.

I think you get the picture. These are a few examples of "checking out".

You might try this on for size...

Just maybe **you could learn** to start a conversation with the people at the Bar-B-Que you don't know without having a few drinks.

Maybe after a terrible day at work **you could figure out** something to do to reward yourself to raise your spirits for working hard all day, other than pouring yourself a couple of drinks.

Maybe on Friday night when you don't have a date **you could get creative** and possibly do something that you've never done before, other than sitting at home by yourself drinking beer.

Having a loved one pass away can be really tough, but drinking isn't going to make them come back.

Maybe when you're bored **you could utilize your existing resources** to be productive (think of what William Shakespeare did with 26 letters).

Maybe if you've done something to be ashamed of **you could realize that you cannot change the past** and that you'll probably have the opportunity to "choose again".

Maybe if you're at a party where everyone is drinking, **you could abstain from drinking**, as you can "be sociable" without drinking and it is ok to be different as well.

Maybe **you could learn to accept** that if your plane is going to crash, it's going to crash whether you have been drinking or not.

These are a few examples of *dealing* with some possible negative emotions, and growing emotionally from doing so.

Can you think of some particular circumstances in your life where you have opted to have a few drinks instead of dealing with the feelings you had in that situation?

One thing I've learned that abstinence from alcohol has given me is the fact that **I LIKE TO FEEL!** I've learned that it's ok to feel a little sad, and it's ok to be a little scared. All of these types of feelings go along with our personal growth throughout life. Dealing with circumstances and situations such as the ones that I've just previously stated without the use of alcohol is important to your own personal emotional growth, which makes up a big part of *who you are*. This is an excellent reason to stay sober.

Reason # 17

Emotionally Hurt Loved Ones

We've pretty much determined that getting drunk isn't a very wise thing to do, as we have taken a look at several good reasons why it's a good idea to stay sober even if you don't have a drinking problem. These reasons to stay sober are mainly for your own benefit (as well as society's). There is also a very valuable group of people who can be hurt by the potential devastating results of your drunkenness. This valuable group of people is the group of people who love you. You probably don't want to see something bad happen to the people you love, nor do you want to see the people you love go through tough times. It can be very painful to sit back and watch someone you love struggle in life.

We've talked a little about alcohol in relation to...

- Drinking and driving
- Violence
- Acting foolish
- Embarrassment
- *Doing* something you may regret
- *Saying* something you may regret
- Making yourself sick

These negative results from drunkenness may not only be painful to you, but to the people who love you as well. Sure, I've pulled a lot of "stuff" while under the influence of alcohol that my family or my loved ones never found out about, but there were many incidences where they did. The end result of some of my "drunken times" was very painful, but the thought of knowing that I emotionally hurt my family was half of that pain.

There was a period of time where I really didn't have a whole lot of respect for myself, and my behavior at times proved it. I may not have cared about how my behavior might affect my own personal life, but I didn't take into consideration that I may hurt the people who loved me. I didn't want to hurt the people who loved me, but my philosophy at the time was, "I'm the one who has to get out of bed every morning and live my miserable life...I'll do what the heck I want, when I want to do it." I was a scared, selfish young person.

One year, I was so hung over that I couldn't make Christmas day at my Mom's house. I'm sure everyone had a pretty good idea as to why I didn't show up, because I had developed the bad reputation of possibly having a serious drinking problem. I'm also sure that hurt them. This is just one of many examples of how my drunkenness hurt the people who loved me.

Have you ever done something while you were drunk that may have emotionally hurt someone who loves you?

You might say, "Nobody loves me". I'm here today to say, "Don't be so sure". That's another book for another day.

People who love you want you to be happy and see positive growth in your life. You don't need to have a serious drinking problem to get drunk just once and have something bad happen which will cause you a lot of pain. When this happens, you may cause a lot of pain for the people who love you as well. This is a good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 18

Spiritual Disconnection

Religion and spirituality go hand-in-hand, but the two are very different. Religion can be defined as: “A personal or institutionalized system from a basis in such beliefs.” I have found spirituality can be defined many different ways. Webster defines spirituality as “the quality or state of being spiritual; heavenly-mindedness.” I heard someone once say that spirituality is simply following your heart. I happen to believe spirituality enhances one’s ability to discover beauty in things, recognize things that are good, and to recognize truth. Personally speaking, spiritual growth is dependant upon increasing my conscious contact and the continuous search of the will of whom I believe to be God. From my own personal experience, I can state with confidence there are different *stages* of spirituality in relation to spiritual growth.

I have also found that the different stages of spirituality are also accompanied with spiritual highs and spiritual lows. I like to say that I have a “spiritual bank account”. When I put forth a conscious effort into increasing my sense of spirituality, I am “depositing” into my spiritual bank account. When I go long periods of time without “depositing” into my spiritual bank account, I automatically start to “withdraw” from my spiritual bank account.

What does all of this have to do with getting drunk? In reference to the “spiritual bank account”, heavy alcohol intoxication results in “rapid withdraw”. When in a state of drunkenness, one tends to become spiritually “disconnected”. As a matter of fact, alcohol at times has been referred to as a demon. You may have heard of the term “demon alcohol”. This would imply alcohol has a reverse effect on one’s spirituality (not necessarily in a literal sense).

Having a sense of spirituality also gives us personal moral codes in which we live by. Since we have a tendency to become spiritually disconnected when we get drunk, these personal morals that we live by often get compromised. When we compromise our personal morals, normally the end result is having a feeling of shame, guilt, or regret.

No matter what your personal religious beliefs are, most people will agree that having some sense of spirituality is key in achieving a sense of inner peace. Furthermore, most people will also agree that spiritual bankruptcy results in a sense of discontentment or a feeling of being unfulfilled. I’ve mentioned several times previously that we drink for one of two reasons, and one of those reasons is “to alter our state of consciousness”. Subconsciously, one reason we may drink to alter our state of consciousness is to fill an emptiness or void which is caused by a *lack* of spirituality in our personal lives. I use the word “subconsciously” here because I have never met a person who consciously said, “I’m going to the bar and I’m going to have a few drinks to alter my state of consciousness in an attempt to fill a void in my life caused by lack of spirituality.”

I believe most of us want to live life to the fullest and a good percentage of us have a thirst to maximize our potential. A lot of us may rely on our spirituality to seek out what our true purpose in life really is. A lot of us may use our spirituality to try to make sense of all of the things we see taking place around us day by day that doesn't make sense to us. Spirituality is a very important and personal aspect of one's life. No matter what spiritual stage in life you may happen to be in, drunkenness has a tendency to disconnect us spiritually. This is a very good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 19

Set a Good Example

You may have heard the phrase, “Lead, Follow, or Get out of the way”. In life, there are leaders and there are followers. It’s ok to be either, or both. For example, you may be a follower at your job, but a leader in your own home, or a leader amongst your friends, but a follower at home, etc.

If you are a follower, I feel it’s important to “check” the people who you are following. Sometimes you may not have the option of choosing who you follow, such as a boss at work, leaders in social clubs, or people in the military for example. You *can* choose the individuals, who you take advice from, look up to, hang out with, and the people you try to emulate. I think it’s a good idea for everyone to take a good close look at the characteristics and qualities of the people who you look up to and admire.

Here’s an example of what I’m talking about...

When I was a teenager, I really liked “heavy metal” music or the “glam rock” bands of the ‘80’s. Rock n’ Roll became almost a form of religion for me. I listened to the music while spending countless hours in front of the TV watching music videos and band documentaries. You might say I was a typical teen. The problem with this is the people in these bands were my heroes. These are the people who I “followed” and tried to be like. I’m not saying that all of the people in these bands were *bad* people, but most of the bands definitely sent a message of a “sex, drugs, and Rock n’ Roll” form of lifestyle, which was very intriguing and attractive to me. In this case, I was a follower. It took me several years for me to realize these people may have not been the best people to look up to as role models (for umpteen reasons). I loved the music, and still do to a certain extent, but I could have enjoyed the music without “following” the people who made it.

Concerning this specific issue, my dad made an honest attempt to make us kids realize that these may not be the people we want to “follow”. As a teen, we just saw some old guy saying, “That stuff is crap!” I didn’t agree. Back in those days, I came to believe that anything my dad was firmly against *had* to be cool. I certainly do not want to come across as some old guy who says, “YOU SHOULD DO THIS!” or “YOU SHOULDN’T DO THAT!” The only thing that I’m asking you, as a reader of this book, is you consider what is being stated, and to go ahead and make your decisions in life based on what makes sense to you.

If you are a leader, I think we’ll all agree that it’s important to set a good example for the people who look up to you. So far we’ve taken a look at 18 different reasons why it’s a pretty good idea to stay sober. By now we have a good understanding of some of the devastating effects alcohol and drunkenness can have on our own lives and other people’s lives as well. This being said, set a good example. Leaders are much more effective when they “lead by example” opposed to the “Do as I say, not as I do” way of leadership.

I never want my son or daughter to see me drunk. One reason it's important for me to maintain sobriety is so I set an example for my family and for others who may look up to me. At this stage of my life, there's a really good chance that there are only a few people in my life who look up to me. That's ok though. There was a period in my life where I'm sure nobody looked up to me. Today, I feel sobriety is important in life. Now, there may be two or three people who look up to me and I need to set an example.

I didn't grow up in a family where there was heavy drinking. As a matter of fact, I don't think I ever saw my father drunk. On the other hand, I don't recall ever being given any specific reasons as to why I shouldn't use alcohol. As a teen, my parents simply weren't the people who I looked up to, so the fact that they weren't heavy drinkers really doesn't matter here. It was the people who I *did* look up to who had the greatest influence on me. I followed *their* example.

Just for the record, I want to say that just because my parents weren't the people who I looked up to as a teen, does not mean that they shouldn't have been or they aren't now.

Do the people who you look up to have qualities and personal attributes which may benefit you or bring you down as an individual?

Do you send a positive message and set a good example for the people who may look up to you?

If you would like to set an example for the people who may look up to you by remaining sober, you don't have to be a prude or take a "holier than thou" attitude. If your light shines, people will naturally want what you have. Setting a good example for the people who look up to you is a good reason to stay sober.

Reason # 20

Life Can Blossom Without It

From a guy who used to think that your social status was measured by how much one “partied”, I can’t begin to explain how much different life is when alcohol was removed from my life completely. This means abstaining from the use of alcohol in all aspects of my life...social gatherings, ball games, sitting in airports, Friday and Saturday nights, Bar-B-Q’s, company functions, “kicking around” the house on a Saturday afternoon, etc.

I had a drinking problem which “forced” me to quit drinking. In the beginning stages, I wasn’t happy about it. As a matter of fact, sometimes I felt like a little kid who was told he was never going to be able to go to Disneyland ever again. Initially, I had to deal with feelings comparable to this often. Now that a significant amount of time has passed where I have been on the other side of the street, I can assure you that I would have never decided to write this book if I saw any solid benefits in drinking alcohol.

I still have problems today, but the problems I’m faced with are much different than the problems “back in the day”. **Just by making the decision to abstain from alcohol, I no longer have to deal with...**

- Much less money in my pocket
- Hangovers that cause me to be worthless the following day
- Making excuses for the things I may have said when I was drunk
- Trying to cover up the things I might have done when I was drunk that I wouldn’t want anyone to find out about
- Embarrassing myself in front of my family members
- Wetting my bed
- Making myself sick
- People looking at me as if I’m a pathetic fool
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering how I got home the night before
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering if my car is in the driveway
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering how much money I spent the night before
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering if I hurt anyone the night before
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering *exactly* where I was
- Lying in bed in the morning wondering if I did anything to embarrass myself the night before, and wondering if anyone I knew saw me
- Lying in bed in the morning and looking at the clock to find that I was supposed to be at work an hour ago
- Calling in sick to work because I was too hung over to make it in
- Calling in sick to work knowing my boss knows *why* I called in sick
- Having a bad reputation
- Becoming violent

- Going to jail
- Getting hauled off to the hospital being labeled “5150” for suicide threats (it happened twice)
- Calling one my relatives or friends to come bail me out of jail
- Having my driver’s license suspended
- Going to court ordered drinking driver classes
- Paying astronomical attorney fees
- The possibility of hurting someone else for driving under the influence
- Emotionally hurting the people who love me

Some of these issues I had to deal with on a regular basis. These are all problems and issues I no longer have to deal with (thank God) just by abstaining from alcohol use. Obviously, someone who may not have a drinking problem probably wouldn’t have *all* of these types of problems to deal with. Although anyone who has used alcohol heavily in their life, even on a very periodic basis, probably has had to deal with a couple to several of these issues at one time or another. Remember just because I had a drinking problem means that I got drunk more often than someone who does not have a drinking problem. The problems associated with drunkenness are still the same.

What I really find interesting is now I sit back and look at all of those problems which were created in my life because of alcohol, why was I so upset when I *had* to stop drinking? That’s the insanity of it all. I knew alcohol was a major cause of most of my problems, but I had it locked in my mind that I would be more miserable without it. I couldn’t have been more wrong. Maybe this is similar reasoning as to why some battered women continue to stay in their relationships.

The relationship separation between alcohol and myself wasn’t any easy adjustment to make. One of the biggest “triggers” I had to deal with was what to do with my free time. In the past, anytime that I had loose change in my pocket and some free time on my hands, it was pretty automatic that I would go out to a bar, as I didn’t like to drink alone. When I had some free time on my hands, and drinking was no longer an option, I had to force myself to become creative to find alternative things to do with my free time. Initially, this wasn’t easy. Today, I don’t have enough free time to do all of the things I’d like to do, and none of these things involve drinking. It’s very clear to me that abstaining from alcohol over time has enhanced my creativity.

There’s no arguing the fact that there were some very memorable good times in my life that involved alcohol. Although, when I was in the Army there were some very memorable good times in basic training. I also have some really fond memories of bonding with other guys in boot camp but I wouldn’t go through basic training again for all of the tea in China. I hope you get my point.

I listed some of the types of problems that are no longer issues in my life just by making the decision to stop drinking alcohol completely. Here are some of the benefits I have personally reaped that I attribute to staying sober...

- I'm able to maximize my potential on a daily basis because I have a sound, clear mind
- At the time of writing this book, I've actually accumulated a very significant amount of sick time through my job. That's a miracle in itself!
- I have much more loose change in my pocket
- I'm much more tolerable to be around
- My self-confidence has reached levels I never thought possible
- I have developed a reputation as a likeable, hardworking person of integrity amongst my peers
- Policemen can get behind me while I'm driving and my heart rate remains constant
- Other drivers on the road are much safer today
- I'm able to handle problems as they arise in my life much more effectively
- My family has conveyed that they have a new-found respect for me
- I'd like to believe that I set a good example for others to follow, and help them when I can
- I have become a very dependable person
- I have recognized both the emotional and spiritual growth in my personal life, and it keeps growing

These are all positive aspects of my personal life that are direct results from not drinking alcohol. I have come to find out (the hard way) that alcohol in itself has the capability of taking so much away from people while giving nothing positive back in return. Life is tough enough as it is without throwing in a variable such as alcohol. There is absolutely no question that alcohol use contributes to a dysfunctional lifestyle. You may recognize that improving or maintaining your **mind**, **body**, and **soul** is key for fruitful living. Alcohol and drunkenness disrupts all three.

I happen to believe that the art of living is nothing more than being able to solve and overcome life's common problems. Life's common problems are different for each of us, but alcohol certainly doesn't contribute to the art of living one bit. You wouldn't be doing yourself an injustice by any stretch of the imagination by making the decision to abstain from alcohol...even if you don't have a drinking problem. The fact that alcohol has the capability to take so much away from you, while giving you literally nothing in return is a very good reason to just stay sober.

In Closing...

The title of this book is 20 good reasons to stay sober, not 20 good reasons to refrain from drinking alcohol. There is a difference but there is a fine line between the two. Alcohol is legal to use for those who are of age. Alcoholic beverages are also an excepted form of social beverage in our society. I'm not out to bash alcohol or belittle people who drink alcohol. I feel that the beer advertisements we see on television are some of the funniest commercials ever made. I also feel they are really misleading, and somewhat of a lie. Isn't it funny you never see beer commercials with a person who appears to be under the influence? Think about that. You never see a beer commercial with a drunken man beating his wife. You never see a beer commercial with a guy going to jail because he killed someone while driving drunk. You never see a beer commercial with someone waking up with a hangover because they drank too much of their product. You never see a beer commercial with some girl crying because she had compromised her morals while under the influence of the product they're promoting.

I was a guy who just wanted to have a good time. I had no idea that the seeds I was planting as a teen and young adult would one day lead me to say, "My name is David, and I'm an alcoholic." I didn't even know what an alcoholic was. I thought an alcoholic was some "burnt out dude" on a freeway off-ramp begging for money, or some filthy homeless person sleeping on a park bench covered with newspaper.

What exactly is an alcoholic? Alcoholics Anonymous will simply tell you, "We are people who have lost the ability to control our drinking". I don't want to insinuate if you get drunk you're automatically an alcoholic. That's not really true. Getting drunk does set the stage for becoming an alcoholic. Alcohol use can easily lead to alcohol abuse, which can lead to many problems.

Even if you do not have a drinking problem, I feel the twenty reasons to stay sober are valid and are worthy of close consideration by all people. I can't think of anyone, or a type of person, who could be considered exempt. The only difference between an alcoholic and a drunk person who may not have a drinking problem is that an alcoholic gets drunk more often. The same negative circumstances and results from one's drunkenness apply to everyone.

I surely do not want anyone to think that I'm trying to send a message which will deprive people of having a good time. I wish every single person in the world could have a great time every day, although this isn't reality. Coming from a man who lived for having a good time, I've mentioned 20 good reasons to stay sober and I can't think of one good reason to get drunk. You are the person who makes decisions every day in your life in pursuit of peace and pleasure. I want you to know that drinking alcohol will not fulfill this desire, and may very well end up having a reverse effect on your quest for happiness.

If you would like to make the decision to live a sober life, I don't believe that you will regret it. I ask that you take what you may have learned, go live life, and have fun doing it! May God bless you and your decisions for doing the right thing.

Feedback is always welcomed (positive or negative). I really would like to hear your comments. Please feel free to send me an E-mail message to the following address:

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