

Recovery is POSSIBLE, IMPORTANT, and a NEW BEGINNING



Recovery is the Greatest Gift of All

The holidays are a time of giving and receiving, exchanging good wishes, and looking forward to a brighter year ahead. But for someone trapped in a cycle of addiction to alcohol and other drugs, the holidays can be a nightmare. Family arguments and the financial chaos that often results from addiction can make the holidays a time to dread rather than cherish. That is exactly what many people caught in addiction do—they run as fast as they can from this time of year, because facing it honestly is too painful.

This time of year is also one of renewal. For those who have tasted what recovery has to offer, the holidays may conjure up painful images of the past. They also offer the chance of memories filled with hope and personal discovery.

Mark is a recovering alcoholic who now sees the holidays as a time of gratitude. But it wasn't always that way.

"I've got 10 years of sobriety," Mark said. "That first day I walked into an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting was the lowest of my life. It was the first week of January and the holidays were mercifully over. It had been another year of promising to buy gifts for family and friends, and another year when I didn't. My drinking came before anything else.

"I wasn't very good at sharing personal problems. So every holiday I'd show up at my family's door and do my best for a week to hide the shame I felt. Leaving brought great relief.

"Sobriety has brought me many gifts; gifts that have been hard won - my self-respect, for one. It started coming back as I listened to people at AA meetings share stories nearly identical to mine. It was good to know I wasn't alone.

"But the best gift is the ability to have a healthy relationship—something not possible when I was drinking. Within the past year I've met and married the most wonderful woman in the world. I never thought this could happen to me.

"I look forward to the holidays now. I have done my best to make amends to those I hurt during my drinking years. The adults in my family still don't acknowledge my alcoholism. But I do talk to my nieces and nephews about it, and I'm gratified by their love and support.

"Recovery is the greatest gift of all I have ever received. It gave me my life back. No other gift can hope to do that. What I enjoy most about the holidays now is that I get to celebrate that gift and realize that nothing in my life would be possible without it. I've also had the privilege to speak to a number of groups and tell my story. Every time I do I multiply that gift many times. I am truly grateful."

Mark's story can be told over and over. The characters and circumstances may change, but it's still the same story of wellness, personal growth, hope and gratitude, no matter who's telling it.

Maybe you or someone you love knows the first part of Mark's story all too well. There's no better time than now to change and stop the pain. You don't have to hit bottom to get help. Call the Iowa Substance Abuse Information Center (ISAIC), 1-866-242-4111, to locate a chemical dependency treatment center near you.

Help is also available for family members who face another painful year with an addicted loved one. Al-Anon and Nar-Anon are mutual-help support groups for loved ones of alcoholics and drug addicts, respectively. They help members care for themselves. Many treatment centers offer special family programs to help people cope during their loved one's disease. The Iowa Substance Abuse Information Center (ISAIC), 1-866-242-4111, offers information for family members and friends of chemically dependent people.

Thanks to *Alive & Free*, provided by Hazelden, a nonprofit agency