



Sober Again - For Good

A Testimonial by Bob Tankersley

My Dad divorced my mom when I was 5. This was the end result of leaving me at home alone as she walked out on us - again. I remember she had left us a few times before leaving for the last time. My Dad devoted his entire life to working and raising me, his only child. So my childhood was full of fishing, hunting, Scouting and attending events at the Houston Astro-dome quite often. He never went to church during my life with him, but at the age of 4 he saw to it that I went. I was saved and baptized at age 8 and was very active in my church. I was truly in love with Jesus. I would play gospel records in my living room while Dad was at work and between songs preach to an empty couch.

Fast forward to age 18, my Dad was in the hospital for congestive heart failure and bronchitis, it was also during this particular year, the state of Texas raised the drinking age from 19 to 21, the year I turned 19. The first night of his stay in the hospital, I decided it was time to find out what it was like to be drunk. Prior to that day I had never drunk a drop. So, I drove to a local liquor store and bought myself some whiskey. Little did I know, I was simultaneously taking my life in my hands and out of the hands of God. Once I was of legal drinking age, I would hang out with friends and drink a little now and then. This trajectory continued until about age 26 when I got a job as a prison guard. The stresses of that job helped push me in turning to alcohol more and more, and my Christianity was quickly fading.

By age 30 I was fired from my job as a prison guard for excessive and unnecessary use of force and absences due to drinking. That point in my life was where alcohol was primary over everything else, including my children. A year or so after losing my job at the prison, I began a very fruitful career in heavy civil construction; 50k - 100k per year was the norm and I could afford to drink as much and as often as I wanted. Over the 18 years I spent in construction, countless jobs were lost, and my drinking was at full throttle.

I met my current wife in 2010 when I was sent to the RGV with a construction company that had been awarded a contract to build over 20 miles of border wall. In the span of about 10 years I ended up in various emergency rooms after overdosing on alcohol. On one instance the attending physicians told my wife if I didn't quit drinking, I wouldn't live another year. About 5 years after my wife and I married, she threw in the towel and kicked me out. Shortly after, I assumed a divorce was imminent and decided to move to Joliet, Illinois. I didn't know anyone, had no money; just a

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few clothes and my pick-up. So I lived in my truck for about 2 weeks before swallowing my pride and checking into a homeless shelter. While I was there, I would go to the public library and search for jobs. I began emailing my wife after having not communicated with her for over a year. She would tell me that she had started going to church after I left—something unlike her. We mutually agreed after a couple of months that if I could make it back to Texas, she was willing to reconcile. So, I made just enough money, bought a bus ticket and came back to Harlingen. Once I arrived, she picked me up at the greyhound station and dropped me off at Loaves and Fishes.

Over the course of the next few weeks my wife would pick me up from the shelter after she got off work and take me to buy whatever necessities I needed to get by. Some evenings I wouldn't see her because of a Bible study or some church event. Little did I know, seeds were being planted. Then it happened, February 13th, 2017, I was sitting alone on the same bench I sat on the day I arrived. A guy that I had been hanging around with walked up in front of me. He reached into his side pants pocket and pulled out a pint of vodka and handed me the bottle and said "kill it". I drank it, and as soon as I swallowed it a feeling of disgust came over me. I felt ashamed. I felt like I had just let my best friend down. I don't remember the moments immediately after that, but the next time my wife came to pick me up, I told her I wanted to go to church with her.

When I walked in that church and into the loving arms of my pastor who acted as if he had been waiting on me, it was at that moment I walked back into the loving arms of my Lord and Savior. Since February 13th, 2017, I have been free from alcohol. The first few months were difficult. I didn't join a program right away; no counseling and no chemicals - just faith. A few months later my wife and I moved back in together. She has been my rock and best supporter. After a year or so of sobriety and reclaiming my place next to my Savior, I learned of "Celebrate Recovery" from one of the pastors at church. It's here that I learned that I didn't conquer my addiction, Christ did. Celebrate Recovery takes the 12 steps of AA and combines them with the "Beatitudes" found in Matthew, Chapter 5. It's not a program for those battling an addiction, but instead it's for those who are ready to give their hurts, habits, or hang-ups back to God. I'm not going to tell you that it was easy, but once I truly surrendered everything to Jesus Christ, I knew that having a relapse would be as if I was grabbing the spikes and hammer and putting Him back on the cross. If you're reading this, and you need help, I pray you find your way - He's waiting.
