

# BATTLES WITH THE BOTTLE



LUTHERAN HOUR  
MINISTRIES

*People Of Christ With A Message Of Hope*

# **BATTLES WITH THE BOTTLE**

*Dan Kohn is a Christian alcohol and drug counselor, trainer, consultant, and author. He is also a husband of more than 30 years and has two adult children and one grandchild. Dan has been working in the field of addiction for more than 25 years.*



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# INTRODUCTION

As you read in the title, this is a book about battles. It's actually about two "battles." First is the battle "with" the bottle — active alcoholism. Second is the victory battle — the one called recovery, the battle "beyond" the bottle. If you currently find yourself engulfed in either of these battles, this booklet is for you!

You never planned for the battles alcohol introduced into your life. But you *can* experience victory over them — the victory called recovery. The goal of recovery is two-fold: inner peace and restored peace in relationships. But remember that it's rare for any battle to be won alone. While you can have victory, you cannot do it on your own — and you were never meant to. If this is your first reality check regarding the patterns and behaviors related to alcohol abuse, some of what you read might seem harsh. But please do keep reading. For within these pages you will be introduced to the source of strength and love that will lead you to the peace you crave.

Sound too good to be true? Please don't dismiss it; it's the ultimate answer for each and every person searching for light at the end of the struggle.

# WHERE TO BEGIN

Consider Shawn's story. Though each alcoholic's story is unique, Shawn's life drama has similar themes to those of many others, perhaps even yours:

*Shawn was known as a party man. He loved the excitement. But those who knew him best knew Shawn as one who frequently lost control over his drinking. Most of his remaining friends were drinking buddies who drank like he did. His former friends were only embarrassed by his behavior when he was out of control.*

*Shawn's second marriage was threatened by this loss of control. His words and actions went out of control when he abused alcohol; his first wife left as a result. And his two children struggled, not knowing how to deal with their father's changing moods. As a result, they struggled with their love for their father.*

*Shawn's drinking also hurt the family finances, which only made the tension worse. There was always money for alcohol, but bills went unpaid. Money for shared family time was rarely a priority.*

*The second drunk driving charge was the beginning. Now Shawn was required to attend counseling. Though he fought it at first — since he did not feel he had a*

*problem with alcohol — he came to understand that his alcohol pattern was leading to far too many losses in his life. He was ready to make the changes necessary to have real joy and peace. Shawn stood ready to work on his relationships with himself, others, and God.*

Shawn never intended to become an alcoholic — no one does. Nor does anyone purposefully form a relationship with someone whose drinking will prove to be a destructive force. However, this pattern of problems is all too familiar for the staggering number of addicts and their families. Can you relate?

# UNDERSTANDING THE BATTLE

As an alcohol and drug counselor for more than 25 years, I have seen the unintended, but very real, pain and suffering brought on by a loss of control over alcohol. It is indeed a battle, because it is the most popular mood-altering drug in the United States and one of our nation's greatest addiction crises.

This battle becomes very confusing for everyone involved because alcoholism in and of itself is illogical. It's the opposite of love since it is fully self-centered and it confuses those who do not have this dysfunction, since it is so far from what is known as "normal" and "healthy" living.

In addition, many within the alcoholic community have called alcoholism "insanity." Indeed, the second step of the successful 12-Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) makes the following reference: "Come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to *sanity*." You've probably heard the definition of insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results." This is an apt description of the irrational

pattern of repeated drinking especially in the face of the obvious destruction that results from consistent abuse. In these respects, alcoholism is both illogical and insane.

As long as we're looking at definitions, consider that one describes an alcoholic as "someone whose drinking creates repeated, serious life problems, especially in love relationships." Those who are addicted often use qualifiers to defend themselves from accepting the condition of alcoholism. What's your situation? Have you overlooked the serious problems in order to rationalize your pattern of alcohol use?

If you take a closer look at this definition, you'll see that it goes beyond qualifiers, focusing on the ripple effects of alcohol abuse. It's not about the amount you drink; it's not even about how often you choose to drink or get drunk. These can all be potential "clues to bad news," but are not sufficient to fully define an alcoholism problem.

Not even your choice of alcoholic beverage is a clear link to this addiction. Beer is often cited as the most common choice of alcoholics. Yet in reality, the amount of pure alcohol in a 12-ounce can of beer is equal to the standard glass of wine or a shot of the "hard stuff" that goes into a mixed drink.



And we cannot overlook one of the most evident and challenging symptoms of a battle with the bottle: the loss of self-control. First there is the loss of control over the choice to drink when past experience makes it evident that such drinking has clear, hurtful outcomes. What follows is the *outcome* of this first loss of control: the subsequent loss of control over your investment in relationships, of ethical decisions, obeying the law, or controlling your finances, to name a few.

So, where does this leave you? Do you see yourself in the above definitions and patterns? When you connect the dots, do you see them pointing to a pattern of alcohol abuse? If so, are you ready to consider the path to ultimate hope?

# ALCOHOL AND HOPE

Alcohol and hope ... they seem to contradict one another. But, through experience with many clients over the years, I have learned that one of the most vital elements of winning the war that involves the bottle is the spiritual side of recovery. Human solutions are limited. God is the solution! And God is the ultimate source of hope!

Let's return for a moment to Shawn and his story. Once Shawn realized it was time to make some choices that led to change for the better, he began by admitting himself to a treatment facility. After completing the program he joined Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and chose a sponsor. Together they took a long, hard look at the 12-Step Program:

1. Admitted we were powerless over alcohol ... that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Reprinted from A.A. World Services, Inc., copyright owner, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017).

*Shawn noted the frequent references to God — in particular, Step #11 that mentioned “conscious contact with God, as we understood Him ...” But exactly how should “God” be understood?*

*Shawn went on a journey of searching. Many of the gods he encountered required effort on his own part — steps he had to follow, rules he had to keep. And around every corner he found defeat, for he continuously made mistakes; he continuously let himself ... and others ... down. After all, everything that had led to his repeated use of alcohol didn’t go away. And he was far from equipped to handle them on his own. Where was the one true God who could deliver on the promises, who could truly be counted on as the ultimate source of strength and hope? The one who would help him overcome the problems that already existed and the ones yet to come?*

*Then he encountered others struggling through recovery who told him about the Triune God — the Christian God — who is called Triune because He is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Shawn discovered something amazing about this God that was different than all the others. He no longer needed to depend on what he, himself, could accomplish; instead, he could rely on what God had already done for him. It was no longer completely up to him — someone would be*

*there to hold him up, comfort him, forgive him, and love him ... mistakes and all.*

## **THE WINNABLE BATTLE**

There is a parable (a story told to illustrate a concept) in the Christian Bible that offers both insight and hope into what God has already done for us, which in turn provides the key to recovery that is linked to lasting hope. Jesus, the Son of God, shared this story and it can be found in the book of Luke, chapter 15, verses 11 through 24 (Luke 15:11-24). It involves a “prodigal” (wayward) son who left home and got involved in an “eat-drink-and-be-merry” lifestyle. Here follows a summary of the story:

*A younger son demanded his inheritance from his father. The father gave this son the money and the prodigal “squandered his wealth in wild living” (see verse 13). In other words, there was freedom without responsible control.*

*The money was soon gone and the son became desperate. In his state of helplessness and hopelessness, he chose to return home. As Jesus shares, “When he came to his senses,” this wayward son recognized his need to confess his sins to his father*

*(verses 17-19). His expectations were low, his desperation high. He thought his father might at least let him be “one of his hired men.”*

*But then comes the surprise. When this lost son returned home, the father was there to greet him. He celebrated his son’s return. As the story tells it, the father said this about his son: “He was lost and is found” (verse 24).*

This story as told by Jesus offers a picture of God the Father who welcomes anyone who has wandered from Him. In regard to recovery, God is there to say to every prodigal, wayward alcoholic: “Welcome home!”

He says the same to you in the gift of forgiveness. No matter how hard you try, you will never find the path to recovery on your own because our world is filled with a brokenness called sin — your sins as well as mine.

Sins can be defined as those thoughts, actions, and words that separate us from who God created us to be. In other words, S-I-N is Separation In Nature from God. By our own choices, we often walk away from the life God would have us live — a life without hurt, a life in harmony with God and with others.

By what we say, think, and do, we consistently fall farther and farther away from God's will for our lives. But God loves us and wants to have this relationship restored. He had a plan to bring us back into relationship with Him — not by anything we could do on our own, but through the loving sacrifice of His very own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, true man and true God, was sent from heaven to take all of God's anger at our sinfulness and the punishment we deserved upon Himself. He died a painful death upon a cross so that our sins could be forgiven.

You and I are welcomed back into the loving arms of the Father. In terms of your recovery, you can draw the strength you need from the forgiveness that is yours because of what Jesus has already done for you!

This is true strength. It is the complete picture of the anticipation and hope built into Steps #2 and #3 of the 12-Step Program — the story of the prodigal son fits perfectly here. He turned from his wasteful life toward hope. He was in a state of crisis tied to the choices he had made and was ready to turn his life over to his father — over to the power outside himself that might return his life to sanity.

In Steps #4 through #7 we find a pathway to confession and reconciliation with God. Picture the prodigal son in these steps as this turning in his life was occurring:

- He made a searching and fearless moral inventory of himself.
- He admitted to God, to himself, and to another person the exact nature of what he had done wrong.
- He stood ready to have God remove all these “defects of character.”
- He humbly asked Him to remove all his shortcomings.

Steps #8 and #9 outline what the son did in approaching his father:

- He acknowledged (made a list) of those he had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
- He made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

This parable of Jesus is an outline of addiction and recovery! First there was the fall into the addictive lifestyle, then the portrayal of hope when a life is turned around. And at the center is the key to successful recovery, tied to these A, B, C's:



**Admit** there is a problem.

**Believe** that hope is found in God.

**Confess** one's sins to God and *one other person*.

The fourth and fifth stages outline a significant part of the remainder of healthy recovery. It's the "D" and "E":

**Dedicate** one's life to reconciliation and to relationship building — with God, others, and self.

**Extend** love and hope to others in need of guidance and hope.

# VICTORY ITSELF

Recovery is work — but it can be joyous work. There is much that needs to be restored when you choose to give up the bottle and face your new battle. This is recovery's victory battle for your heart, mind, and soul. It is a battle won through the intervention of love — the love of God, who desires to restore every sinner to righteous living.

The Bible offers encouragement, for God is a warrior on behalf of those who are faithful. There is another story in the Bible that may or may not be familiar to you. It's about a young boy named David who won the battle against a giant named Goliath. Meditate on the words of young David regarding his fight with the giant Goliath: “... *for the battle is the LORD's*” (1 Samuel 17:47).

Think of the “booze battle” as your Goliath — your giant — then make the cry of the victorious David your own: “*For the battle is the LORD's.*” God is powerful and available to help you beat the odds, to achieve victory regardless of the “giant-size” battle you face.

In yet another place in the Bible, an older David — King David — writes about our victorious God in one of his many psalms: “*Who is this King of glory?*”

*The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle” (Psalm 24:8).*

It’s vital to realize that recovery is not about comfort. It’s about conviction. It’s about self-sacrifice, about dedication to the Savior who sacrificed Himself on the cross to create a path of reconciliation. His name is Jesus Christ, and a part of His mission was to reconcile each sinner back to God. He loves you and wants to draw you closer to Him.

If I had to choose a quote from Scripture to summarize recovery from a Christian perspective, it would be this one: *“And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy — the kind He can accept. When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how His ways will really satisfy you” (Romans 12:1-2 LB).*

In my years of experience, I have seen the reality that recovery works best from a Bible-centered approach. It’s all about turning toward Christ. He understands sacrifice. He knows about complete commitment to what is honorable, holy, and necessary. He

went to the cross and died for all sins, including those you may have committed while drinking.

Recovery is about relationships. It's about a "vertical" relationship between God and you, the one in recovery (Steps #2, #3, #5, #6, and #11). And it's about "horizontal" relationships — those between you and others you may have harmed emotionally, spiritually, and physically (Steps #8 and #9). Finally, it is about your relationship with others who are in need of recovery (Step #12). God and these people become an active part in your recovery. They are there to offer forgiveness and support, as well as maintaining accountability.

God comes with unconditional love and grace to counter your guilt and shame. You do not get the rejection and judgment you might fear. There are no fingers pointed; instead, you find the extended arms of Jesus on the cross — arms of grace, love, and forgiveness. You are welcomed with the words of Jesus Himself: *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28).

# FROM EVERY ANGLE

Recovery occurs on many fronts: your new understanding of self and identity of integrity, damaged relationships to be restored, legal and financial challenges to be overcome, and physical damage to the body that needs attention.

But in order to get at the various angles, you need to start at the beginning.

Establishing or renewing a relationship with God is a critical early stage. This is confession time. This is time to get past the deceptions and into solid truth — God's secure plan for those who follow His lead.

What you cannot do alone is turned over to God, the ultimate source of hope, strength, and encouragement. The three essential pillars of recovery are sobriety, honesty, and humility, with the latter two being strongly spiritual in nature. Truth is invaluable. Joy and hope are found in these words of Jesus: *"... the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32) and *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"* (John 14:6).

# ONE LAST STEP

Recovery is not easy. But the more you come to know and exalt Jesus as your source of hope and reconciliation, the greater the promise of lasting recovery.

Hold onto these verses from the Bible for hope: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). Yes, you have a calling from God: a call to holy living. It is your response to God’s love and grace.

There is one final step that is part of your response; it’s a part of “giving back” — of completing the “love circle” of recovery (God to the addict — the addict to himself and others — and now the addict to others in need so they too can experience God’s love) as concluded in Step #12: “Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and practice these principles in all our affairs.”

*Shawn found that spiritual experience and through the power of Jesus, he won victory over his battles. He stood ready to carry that very message to others who were struggling.*

If you are struggling, know that your battle with the bottle is conquerable; your battles in recovery are winnable. God is prepared to help you achieve victory. Jesus opened the doorway of hope, of reconciliation, of wholeness of life. *"The battle is the LORD's!"*

# RESOURCES

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)

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