

ADDICTION

SUMMIT



This Naked Mind Approach to Freedom from Alcohol and Addictions

Guest: Annie Grace

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Dr. Paul Thomas: Welcome to another episode of the Addiction Summit. I'm Dr. Paul, your host. It is beyond my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you who I would say is my favorite author now, Annie Grace. She authored this book, all right, *This Naked Mind: Control Alcohol, Find Freedom, Discover Happiness & Change Your Life*. She presents a unique approach that really helps you deal with subconscious/unconscious mind and what society has done for us or to us or we've allowed to happen to ourselves. Annie, I just have to read something that you have in the beginning, near the beginning of your book, because when I read this, this thing is underlined. I mean I couldn't put it down. I should have you read it. This is your book. Can I read it?

Annie Grace: Yeah, of course. That's awesome.

Dr. Paul Thomas: "I now have freedom. I'm back in control and have regained my self-respect. I'm not locked in a battle for sobriety. I drink as much as I want, whenever I want. The truth is, I no longer want to drink. I see now that alcohol is addictive, and I had become addicted. It goes on a little lower down. I know you may find this hard, if not impossible, to believe. That's okay. But I can give you the same freedom, the same joy, and the same control over alcohol in your life. I can take you on the same journey, a journey of facts, neuroscience, and logic, a journey that empowers you rather than renders you

powerless, a journey that does not involve the pain of deprivation. I can put you back in control by removing your desire to drink. But be forewarned. Getting rid of your desire for alcohol is the easy part. The hard part is going to be going against group think, the herd mentality of our alcohol saturated culture.”

Wow. So I think some of our viewers know my story. We’re going to get into yours here real soon. I drank alcoholically from the start, but I had such little opportunity to drink most of my life. I was a missionary kid in Africa. I was on a mountain in Swaziland for high school. That kept me safe and somewhat limited. But when I hit the States in college, I mean I was off and running.

And eventually I have overcome that battle of being just hopelessly addicted. I wish I’d had this book back when I was trying to figure it out. I was a doctor. I was drinking too much. And I couldn’t figure this thing out. We drank a lot alike. I read the book, so I know a little bit of your story. But maybe for the viewers who don’t know you, who don’t know your story, maybe you could start with just telling your story as it relates to addiction and alcohol.

Annie Grace: Absolutely. So first of all, it’s such a pleasure. Thank you for having me. I really grew up without a lot of caution around alcohol. My parents didn’t drink. And so it wasn’t something in my house that was like... I just didn’t know. I was very naïve. And I’m not alone in being naïve around alcohol. I think a lot of people that I speak to these days, especially younger people, are extremely naïve. And so I didn’t really realize that alcohol was harmful. And I certainly did not understand that it was addictive.

And so I didn’t even drink too much in college. But then after I got out of college, I was 26 years old. My husband and I moved to New York City. And I became the youngest vice president in this large multinational company. And I was told that drinking alcohol was just kind of part and parcel for the entire experience. I was actually told that going out to happy hour was a lot like the golf course. That’s where the deals were done. That’s where you networked. That’s where you pitched your ideas. That’s where you met people, stuff like that. And so since I wasn’t a big drinker, but I didn’t really have any big caution about it, I said, “Okay, great.”

So I actually developed a method. I’d have a glass of wine. And then I’d have a glass of water in order to keep up with all these heavy drinking colleagues. And really, I got good at drinking. And I ended up developing a crazy tolerance. And fast forward a decade, and I’d gotten promoted multiple times in my job. I was now head of marketing in charge of 28 countries. I was traveling internationally twice a month, and I was drinking probably more than a bottle, close to two bottles, of red wine every single night. And it did not matter if I was at work or I was at home. And I had two young kids at the

time. And I just realized that wow, this is not who I set out to be. I did not mean for this to happen. I felt like there was never a moment where I said, “Okay, I’m going to drink more.” There was never a choice, it felt like. It was just all of a sudden there I was.

And so I started to try to set limits on my drinking and really try to cut back. And I didn’t find it easy. And that was the moment. It was a really tough moment because I was like okay, what’s happening here. And every time that I would be able to, say, not drink for a night, my husband’s like, “Maybe we should have the night off,” I could do it, but not without feeling deprived, not without feeling frustrated, angry. And then if I did end up drinking, I’d feel guilty. So I was basically on both sides. If I didn’t drink, I was miserable. If I did drink, I was miserable. And so I was pretty much miserable. And what do you do when you’re miserable? You drink more to numb the misery.

And so that cycle quickly escalated to the point where I realized that, yeah, this is definitely very problematic. And it was actually in that moment where kind of counter culturally—but I didn’t really know it at the time—I realized that it hadn’t always been this way. And something else was happening with me at the time. I was having very severe lower back pain. And that was unexplainable. I’d been to doctors, chiropractors, acupuncturists. I was in traction, muscle relaxants, you name it. And I could not fix this.

And my dad, actually, was riding up the gondola with a friend of his. And this guy recommended a book called *Healing Back Pain* by Dr. John Sarno. And in the beginning of the book it says look, sometimes undiagnosable pain actually resides in your subconscious mind. And here’s why, because your brain will protect itself from thoughts that it finds abhorrent. And so it will protect itself by distracting itself through pain so these thoughts and these painful things don’t surface.

And it says in order to understand this consciously, you’d say okay, maybe that sounds like a possibility. But really subconsciously the pain is still going to exist. I need to convince you. You have to read this 300-page book where I lay out all the medical knowledge, all the facts, everything else. And guess what? I will have convinced your conscious mind and your subconscious mind, and your pain will disappear. And I was very skeptical. I thought okay, this is a bunch of BS. That’s crazy. But I was also desperate. So I said, “Okay, I’m going to do it.” I read the book, and sure enough he was right. And it just disappeared. The pain went away.

Dr. Paul Thomas: You’re kidding?

Annie Grace: It was incredible.

Dr. Paul Thomas: The back pain went away.

Annie Grace: Back pain went away, very severe back pain.

Dr. Paul Thomas: That's amazing.

Annie Grace: And so it was the first point in my life where I was like oh my gosh, this thing between my ears, super powerful, way more powerful than I'd given it credit for. So I actually reached out to Dr. Sarno. I was put in touch with somebody on his team named Steve Ozanich. And I said, "Hey, would this work because I think this is what's happening. I think that I have this very powerful conscious desire to drink less for my health, my family, for everything else.

But I think that unconsciously, subconsciously, I have these deeply ingrained beliefs that alcohol is vital to life and that I'm missing out if I don't have it. And so could I fix that by changing my subconscious?" And he's like, "Absolutely. Dr. Sarno always said this would work for addiction 100 percent." And that kind of launched me on this year-long journey of I decided I was going to stop trying to stop drinking. I was just going to do the research.

And so I took a year where I was not going to beat myself up for drinking. I wasn't going to live in that land of desperation and moderation and misery and willpower. But I was just going to do the research, both on how to change the subconscious mind and on alcohol, more importantly, on what it really was and what it was doing to my body and my brain. And out of that year I had this huge thick stack of journals. And I remember walking out of my office one day.

And I told my husband, I was like, "Okay, if you want to get drunk with me again, tonight's the night, because after this I'm done." He's like, "What?" And he was so surprised. And sure enough, we shared a bottle of wine. I ended up getting sick on half a bottle of wine, which I think was just the fitting end to it all. And then that was it. And I realized, wow, people need this. So I actually just figured out how to put up a web page. And I PDF'd all my typed out journals. And I put them up for free download and had 20,000 people download them within the first two weeks that they were up.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Wow.

Annie Grace: And so I said, "I need to make this a book." And so I figured out how to self-publish it. And then it's gone crazy. I mean now it's been picked up traditionally because it just globally sold so many copies. Yeah, so it's been a really wild journey but really incredible.

Dr. Paul Thomas: That's amazing. So this book has sort of given people a different approach. And I read it, and I couldn't put it down because I didn't believe it when I read what I read to begin with.

So I'm an alcoholic of the type where if I take one drink, I've got to have more. And I proved that to myself over and over and over again. So I'm reading that. And I wanted to throw it away. I'm like this is ridiculous. But I was curious. So I start reading. I'm going hmmm. And by the time I got done, folks, you've got to read this book if you're struggling with any addiction because it's about changing, I think, how you think about the whole thing.

But I want to know more, maybe, to help our viewers because I'm sure there are some viewers who are thinking just like I was thinking, no, give me a break, right. What is that process that you walk people through to help them get in touch or unwire that subconscious or unconscious mind?

Annie Grace: Yeah, so it was great. So I found this process. And it was actually developed by a man named Dave Gray, who I've since become friends with. And it's called liminal thinking. And liminal is a space between your conscious and your subliminal, that liminal space. And there have been lots of experts, sort of, in the mind that have said that anything unconscious can become conscious if you dig down into it, and you surface it, right. And so that's it, if you imagine that you have this belief but the belief feels true. It feels as true as it feels that the sky is blue.

So I was so convinced that alcohol relaxed me at the end of a hard day and that without it I didn't know how to relax. I was just absolutely convinced. I believed it like I believed the sun came up in the morning. But that belief is actually founded on a pyramid of your experiences and your observations and your conclusions and your assumptions.

And so that reality is down here. That belief is founded up here. So if you go back down and you say, "Okay, well how did this belief come to be? What were the experiences that I had? What are the observations that I made? What conclusions did I draw? What did I assume?" And then you can actually say, "Okay, is it true?" And so there's a method that I've developed myself. And it's going to be coming out in my second book called *The Alcohol Experiment*.

And I call it the three Ds. And it's Define, Deconstruct, and Decide. So define what your belief is. I believe I need alcohol to relax. You deconstruct that belief. That's the liminal part. Where did it come from? Why do I have this belief in the first place? Where did it originate? Did I always believe this? Stuff like that. And then you decide if this belief is true based on two questions, internal evidence and external evidence. So does alcohol relax me? I look

internally, and I say, “Am I more relaxed or less relaxed an hour after a drink?” I’m a little less relaxed because alcohol... Or am I more or less relaxed the next day day after drinking? I’m less relaxed.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Definitely not a day after.

Annie Grace: I’m pretty miserable. And so what is the external evidence, right? And so then you look at the science, and you say, “Okay, am I more or less relaxed an hour after drinking?” Well when you have a drink, alcohol actually releases cortisol and adrenaline into your body. Cortisol is the stress hormone. So neurochemically, I’m actually less relaxed. Or there was a study done on mice, where they fed them alcohol. And then they put them through an obstacle course. And then they measured, compared to mice that hadn’t had alcohol, how they reacted to stressors.

And the mice who had been drinking for 30 days were [inaudible] with the stressors in their life. And then you say, “Okay, externally and internally these are my conclusions.” And then you make a decision. And actually, that belief that you felt was so true that you felt like, oh, this I believe like the sun comes up, it just kind of lets go of you because you’ve surfaced your unconscious beliefs around it. And when it lets go of you, then the next time you reach for a glass to relax you’re like, oh, that won’t really do what it says. And so you don’t want it. And then that is really where the beauty is.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Gotcha. So you’re educating yourself about the real nature of alcohol.

Annie Grace: Exactly.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Where I think I would get confused when I was back in it, when I was drinking a lot, is, as you did, because I know you drank like I did, you go through withdrawal when you don’t have your alcohol, physical withdrawal. And it feels horrible, right. You just have that numb feeling, that fogginess in the head that you know that one drink’s going to help. And so I think, just taking at face value what you said, I might get confused and go, “No, no, no, Annie. When I take a drink, I feel better because I’m dealing with that withdrawal.” How can you help our viewers understand a little past that?

Annie Grace: Yeah, absolutely. So I’ll give you a specific example. And so alcohol is an interesting substance because it is both a stimulant and a depressant at the same time. And it’s a stimulant because when you drink, your blood alcohol content starts rising. And that is the feeling of feeling your inhibitions lower. You feel the tipsy feeling. You feel slight euphoria and stuff like that. So they’ve done some research to say your blood alcohol content

from one drink will rise for between 20 minutes to up to 60 if you have a full stomach, but usually 20 to 30 minutes. But then it plateaus. And then your blood alcohol starts falling. And when your blood alcohol levels are falling, that's a wholly unpleasant feeling. That is uneasiness. You feel needy. You feel uncomfortable in your own skin.

Dr. Paul Thomas: That's why we take that next drink, maybe.

Annie Grace: Exactly. And so you actually feel worse than you did before you had the first drink. And so, the next drink you keep drinking to keep your blood alcohol rising. Now the two things that are really interesting about this is, number one, we do that all night long, right. Every 20 to 30 minutes we take another drink. And then our blood alcohol ends up falling mostly overnight. So this isn't really apparent. So we wake up the next morning. We don't feel great. We definitely don't feel as good as we did the night before. And we're looking forward to the evening again for our next set of drinks.

But we don't connect that to the fact that that bad feeling was created by the alcohol. We just assume it's a stressful day. And then the other thing that's really interesting to know is that that 20 to 30 minutes that you get of rising is followed by two to three hours of falling. So you're really trading the 20 to 30 minutes for two to three hours. So it's one of the things that absolutely hooks us and tricks our brains, is that it does feel good. But it feels good because it's relieving something that it created.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Interesting. So that might be why—I had this little aha moment—most of us who drink heavily did it at night. I mean if you're a morning drinker because you're getting the shakes, you're really in trouble, right. I mean then you're 24 hours, and the slide is about to end. But for most heavy drinkers, or whether you want to call yourself an alcoholic or whatever, we drink at night. And then I think I remember reading in our book that you have this wake up in the morning 3:30 a.m. or something like that. Was that your book that I read that in?

Annie Grace: Yeah.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. What was going on there? And maybe that slide was just getting uncomfortable.

Annie Grace: Yeah, absolutely. So I mean alcohol interrupts our sleep. But we don't realize it. So it puts us into a really deep sleep initially. But then it never lets us get into REM sleep. So REM sleep is absolutely vital. And then in the mornings, the calories and stuff that you've consumed in alcohol all kind of

flood your system. And so you end up being really awake and restless. And that's that process of your blood alcohol constant is falling.

Another interesting thing that happens is because alcohol is poison, your body actually stops doing other normal functions like processing glucose in your liver and stuff like that just so that it can process the alcohol. So it stops even digesting food, to some degree, just so that it can process the alcohol. So all these other things have been put on hold. And then when the alcohol is finally processed, boom, your body kicks back into gear. You wake up, and it's like, "Oh my gosh, here I am." And you have all sorts of regret and trauma.

And you know it if you've been on vacation. And I know I've done this plenty of times, where you're like, "Okay, it's 11:00. We're on the beach. We're going to get drunk." And we get drunk. And then by 1:30 p.m. everybody is feeling totally horrible, tired. Then you go through the rest of the afternoon trying not to drink anything. And then you're even trying to piece it together for dinner. And you never ever feel good for the rest of the entire day. But again, like you say, mostly we drink at night. So that feeling of how it feels to come down from alcohol is usually reserved for when we're asleep, until we wake up and we beat ourselves up for a while.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, that's a really good point. I've had a couple of those instances where I broke my rule not to drink in the morning and started too soon. And, oh, they were horrible days, absolutely horrible.

Do you think this same phenomenon of the addiction experience with alcohol can kind of translate to other addictions?

Annie Grace: Yes, I do. I think so because really the keys are understanding what's happening in your body, understanding that the things you think that the substance is doing, it's often just fulfilling a need that it created in the first place. I say that yes, alcohol will pick you up. But it will never pick you up as far as it knocks you down to begin with. You're always kind of creating a debt. And so that's true for really any addiction, is that it overstimulates part of our brain, part of our pleasure center. And then we're always trying to play catch up to that. So I think, yeah, absolutely it can work for other things as well.

Dr. Paul Thomas: No, I think that's true. And those of you who've been using meth, for example, it's such a huge potent stimulant of dopamine release. You just deplete your dopamine. So when you stop that meth run, I mean you sleep for days. You're just so completely wiped out. So that's that debt thing you're talking about.

One of the things I found helpful in your book that I'll maybe have you describe is you talk about alcohol being a poison and how animals wouldn't choose to. Can you elaborate just a little bit about that because I thought it was helpful to read that. And maybe it'll be helpful for our viewers to hear that. What about that with alcohol?

Annie Grace: Yeah, so it's funny because the other day I was actually getting gas. And it was just two days ago. And there's this big, "This product contains ethanol." And it's this big huge thing. And it's like a warning symbol on the gas pump. And I'm like, wow, that's really interesting because that means my gas pump actually has a bigger warning symbol than the whiskey bottle, even though the whiskey bottle also contains ethanol. And it's the exact same thing.

And so you can think about it another way. If you're a wild animal, right, so say you were a deer, and you're foraging for grass, and you come across something and you start to eat it, and it tastes really, really bad, you're going to spit it out. And that's nature's way of saying, "Hey, this is poison. This isn't good for you." Poison quite often tastes really bad. And if you take alcohol, the part that gets you drunk, the part that stimulates your brain, the part that is what makes us addicted, out of all the mixers, out of all the distilled everything else—yes, you can acquire a taste to it—but pure alcohol, ethanol, the stuff, it tastes horrible.

And it will kill you in very, very small quantities. And so we add all this other stuff to it to make it palatable for us so that it kills us slower instead of killing us immediately. But really the truth is that, like I said in the book, there are studies where they tried to give animals alcohol, and they won't drink it because bing, bing, bing, little mother nature is saying, "No, no, don't do that. That will kill you."

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, they've done rat studies, too. Rats in isolation might drink alcohol because they're just, I think, so isolated and desperate. They should be in community. But if they have rat park, where they've done those studies, right, where they play, and they have community, they won't touch alcohol or opiates. They'll just drink water. What's up with us humans? We don't think right? We think too much?

Annie Grace: Yes, we overthink. We've got these great instincts, but then we've got this intellect. And we let our intellect override our instincts. So a really good example of this is you're a kid. And somebody gives you your first sip of something. And you say, "Oh, it tastes bad." And then you look around at all your parents and you go, "But it must be great because everybody's doing it." So we reason ourselves into thinking there must be some benefit

because why else would everybody be drinking something that tastes so bad. And so we let our intellect override our instincts and get ourselves in trouble.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. What do you see are some of the other influences that we're all being bombarded with that make us sort of tune out to the dangers of alcohol?

Annie Grace: Well I think that this is true for alcohol and just about everything else. You can go and watch pretty much every single TV commercial. And every single one is telling you that you need something to make yourself complete or better or you just are in lack. And so they tell you in different ways. They tell you, "Okay, well this is a really cool thing because it will do this for you." Or, "This is a really important thing because it will do this for you."

But ultimately the core message in almost all commercials is that somehow you are not good enough, somehow you are in lack, somehow there is something fundamentally wrong and missing about you. And so we develop this feeling just overall as humans not just from media, but it's just from all sorts of different things, that there's something missing in our lives, that we need something else to be more and whole.

And so alcohol really capitalizes on that, especially in the media. I mean every single commercial that you see, it's promising companionship, it's promising an end to loneliness, it's promising these very deep fundamental human needs of belonging. And I mean really, if we're honest about it, yeah, sure you start off drinking socially. But then guess what? You end up drinking by yourself and isolating completely just to drink. And so it actually steals all those things from you.

But I think that it's not easy to sell something that is very destructive and addictive. So people have to really dig deep to say, "Okay, how can I make this attractive? Well I'm going to make promises that just fundamentally aren't true." But then because it is addictive, we take those promises, we start it, and then we become addicted. And guess what? The advertiser's job is done because it's like all right, this stuff will sell itself because I've gotten these people dependent on it.

Dr. Paul Thomas: That addictive substance, what you just said there, when I was in college and starting, like you, I'd been so sheltered. I didn't know that I was playing with fire. I've got a book, *The Addiction Spectrum*, that kind of talks about that journey so many of us take with our addictive substances, from being non-users or non-drinkers to sliding along into the severe end where we're in trouble. And I think your book, it just gives people real information so that they can wake up to what they're actually doing.

Although I wonder. I've raised nine kids. Well I have a bunch of kids. Some of them were adopted when they were already teenagers. So I don't get credit for totally raising them. But I've raised a lot of teenagers. How are we going to get them to hear this message that you share? Do you have any thoughts about that? I'm thinking to tell my teenagers that alcohol is addictive. You shouldn't touch it. I don't know if they're going to hear it.

Annie Grace: Yeah, it's funny. I think two things about that. I think, number one, people, teenagers especially, even though we don't feel like they're looking to older people for how to behave or how to act, they do. And so I get asked this all the time, "Well how do I talk to my teenagers about this?" And what we want to do is we want to just tell them what we know and not what we did. So we want to tell them what we now know, give them a directive, say, "Alcohol's addictive; don't touch it." But we want to leave out our entire story because we feel like oh, if they knew what I did maybe they wouldn't love me, or maybe they wouldn't feel connected with me, or maybe they would judge me, or maybe they would actually do what I did if they actually knew what it was.

And I think the opposite is true. I think that actually when we can be really honest about our own stories and our own journeys, that is the most profound teaching of our teenager years. And we're very loath as parents to talk to our kids about where we struggle. But our kids are surprisingly, amazingly intelligent. And they have a huge capacity to understand. And I don't think that people, in general, human beings, we don't learn well from directive. We don't learn well from rules and from direction. We learn well from stories and connection.

And so the more that you can be just truly honest about your journey and where you'd stumbled with your kids, I think that is the most profound effect you can possibly have on your children. And then that will open a door for them to ask questions because in your vulnerability—vulnerability just by definition breeds connection. But it's something we never want to do. We never want to be vulnerable, especially with our kids. And I just think that's a mistake.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. That's a good point. With this summit, I'm trying to encourage people to just share, be vulnerable. So thank you for that.

Taking you back, then, to that vulnerability piece, when you went to your husband and you said, "This is my last drink," was that your last drink?

Annie Grace: So it wasn't, because I did something really interesting. About four months after that—was it four months? I don't remember exactly how long it was, but it was months after. I had no more alcohol in my system. I

was totally over the physical withdrawals. Everything was going great. And I was like, “Okay, but what if I’m missing out?” I just felt like what if I’m missing out.

And so what I did was really interesting. I wanted to, again, apply the scientific mind to this entire thing. And I wanted to say, “Okay, well, how does alcohol actually truly make me feel?” And so what I did is I said, “Okay, this is what I’m going to do.” I went, and I got two bottles of wine. I didn’t let myself fall back into drinking because I knew if I just fell back into it, and especially if I did it at something that was fun, like a concert or a social event or out to dinner with my husband, it would’ve been fun. It would’ve fulfilled the thing. And so, no, no, no. I want to understand exactly what this actually is like and answer the question, “Am I missing out on something?” And I was really open. I was like if I feel like I’m really missing out and this really was vital to life, then maybe I’ll make a different choice. But I just want to know.

So I took my two bottles of wine. I locked myself in a room. I got out my phone. I propped it up on a little video camera. And I filmed myself for about three hours getting drunk. And there were two key things that happened here. Number one, I didn’t have any physical withdrawals anymore or any symptoms because I hadn’t drank in months. And number two, I removed all the external stimuli. We constantly couple every amazing experience we have from outdoor barbecues to baby showers with alcohol.

And so, these things are together. And we think that, “Oh, it’s the alcohol that’s making this football game fun. Oh, it’s the alcohol that makes dancing fun.” And if you decouple it and say okay, “What is the alcohol by itself actually doing?” that’s the question I wanted to answer. And so I filmed myself. And I thought, “Oh, it’s going to be fun, and I’ll be up all night. I’ll be letting loose.”

And it just wasn’t fun. It was weird. It felt like the edges were getting fuzzy kind of around. And I felt fuzzy in the brain. I felt dizzy. I didn’t feel great. I didn’t get really drunk fast. I tried to really make it slow so I could really be mindful. And I recorded the entire thing. And it took me three years to watch those videos because I watched just a tiny snippet the next morning, and I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe what happened around my eyes. I couldn’t believe how my entire nature changed. I couldn’t believe how I went from a happy, sunny, somewhat intelligent person to just a very unintelligent person.

I mean I just hated everything about it. And so it was definitive for me. It was without a shadow of a doubt. And there’s not been anything more profound in my journey than that experience because the biggest changer of your beliefs is your own experience, 100 percent. You can learn all day long, but it isn’t until

you can experience something that that truly changed. And then from that moment on I was like okay, well there's nothing there. I just knew it. And I proved it to myself.

Dr. Paul Thomas: So have you not drank since then?

Annie Grace: No.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Not at all.

Annie Grace: Uh-uh.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Not at all. Okay, so this is important, folks. A couple of thoughts I had about this. What you did was unique, in my opinion. But I know you have a lot of people who are following along with your plan. And they're having success, right?

Annie Grace: Yeah, people don't always do that part, though. Or they get it wrong, where they say, "Okay." They've been drinking, and then all of a sudden, they're like, "I'm going to do an experiment tonight." And so they do an experiment. And they haven't had the 30 or 40 days.

Dr. Paul Thomas: That's the key I wanted to point out. So back when I was drinking, I had that withdrawal phenomenon that was so powerful that that first drink always felt amazing. It just lifted the fog. And so you can't do this experiment you're talking about if you're still in the drinking mode. You're treating withdrawal. And that's a whole different ballgame.

This is very amazing what you did. I have a son who's intermittently struggled with alcohol. And he has a YouTube channel. And he put up this video of doing kind of what you're talking about. It was so horrifying to watch it. I said "Take that down." It was just horrible. So he did because he has a channel that I thought, "This is going to ruin your channel, kid." But that's the truth of the matter. That point you make of dissociating it from all the fun activities, right. We watch movies. The movie stars are having fun with alcohol. And the ads, it's always the gorgeous people having fun. And we make those little subconscious, or what you call unconscious, associations. And it becomes a part of us that alcohol's fun.

Annie Grace: Yeah.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. Have there been any changes in your philosophy? You really are bringing forth a unique perspective of how to sort of approach addiction, alcohol use. You've been at this now for a while, right? How long have you been not drinking alcoholically or heavily?

Annie Grace: Four years.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Four years.

Annie Grace: So I think there have been changes. I think that my first book, *This Naked Mind*, you really have to be in the mode that I'm trying to search for a solution to this. So I had a few reviews that were just the coolest reviews, right. So they're on Amazon. And they're these reviews. One of them was, "I read this for my brother. And then guess what? I don't like beer anymore. Thanks a lot." It was a five-star review. And I was like okay, that's cool, right.

So I got to thinking. And I had another review from somebody who said, "I was doing a Whole30. And the alcohol was the hardest part. And so I read your book, and it really helped me with my Whole30." And so I was thinking okay, well what about all the people who are still questioning it but aren't ready to look for a book. And so here's the thing, is I want to back up the conversation. I feel like I would've been in such a better place, and it would've been even easier for me to let go of the alcohol, and I would've saved myself years of just miserable drinking if there was a resource for me when I first started to question it because for most people the moment you first start to question it and then the moment you do something about it is often six years, okay. That was true for me. It was probably longer than that.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, decades I think.

Annie Grace: Yes, right. And so how can you back it up to say, "Okay, here's something when you're first starting to question." We have incredible resources for when people are like, "Okay, I'm ready. Check me in. I need help." This is saturated. There's so much support. There is nothing for when people are just first starting to question. And so, I was like how can I lower that barrier that [inaudible] alcoholexperiment.com. It's a free 30-day challenge.

And it's really not for people who are dependent because you're going to give it up cold turkey day one, and you're going to go 30 days. So do not do it without a doctor if you're dependent. It's so dangerous. But for most heavy drinkers, according to the CDC, of excessive drinkers, only 10 percent are clinically dependent. So this is really for the 90 percent who are just starting to question, "How would life be if I just took a 30-day break?" And through that 30 days I kind of deliver, every single day, different kind of points about alcohol via video and email. And so by the end of the program, people are like, "Wow, I want to do another 30 days," or, "Wow, I'm going to do 60 days." And so they really get back to whatever level feels good for them.

So you're absent for the 30 days, but after that I provide resources and a plan for people to go back to where they feel comfortable so that they can get a hold of this before it becomes a huge problem. And I think that, yeah, my goal is just like how can we lower the barrier to entry? How can we make a resource for people when they're questioning, before they reach that point of rock bottom?

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. My gut feeling, and I'd be interested in your take on this, for me and the way I drank, which was I loved the effect so I always drank to excess. Had I gotten your book and this concept early, maybe while I was in college or grad school or med school, before I was into daily, this could've changed my life. I mean I might've been able to make the decision, "You know what? I think I'm just going to skip poisoning myself," right, because I could make that intellectual thought process. I reached a point in my drinking where I had lost that ability of choice. And I mean I was so addicted that I came to the same conclusion I think you came to.

So remember when I read at book at the beginning of our talk, and it kind of implied we're going to teach you how you can drink safely or that you'll have the choice over this? Well, in my case I reached that point where I cannot safely take another drink. I mean I just know that. I wouldn't risk it. I wouldn't want to. I have such freedom now. I mean my life is so amazing. And I used to be in bondage. So why would I choose to go back to bondage? It feels like yours was a little more of just an intellectual thing. Maybe you could handle the experiment that you did. I wouldn't even have the guts to try that.

Annie Grace: Yeah, and you shouldn't.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Right. What if it rekindled that craving and then I couldn't stop?

Annie Grace: So how I understand this, and it's a phenomenal question, there is a theory called the dopamine sensitivity theory. I believe that's what it's called. And basically, you can look at it as your brain literally changes over time and exposure to alcohol. The pathways of addiction that happen inside your brain can become irreversible. So we come to the sense that one drink when you've become hypersensitive to this can put you right back into binge mode and right back into the most dangerous point of your addiction, just one drink, because although the pathways can become overgrown...

So if you imagine a neuropathway is like two trees. And you're walking between two trees, right. And then over time you walk, and it's become this deep rut, and then you stop walking on that pathway, branches can overgrow. Plants can overgrow. It can stop bugging you. You're not seeing that path anymore. It's not in your day to day life. But if you take one more drink, you're

right back in the rut, right. And that absolutely happens after very prolonged heavy drinking. And it's something people need to be aware of.

And I think that in my work there are a lot of kind of things at the end to say, "Okay, where are you?" because the sooner you can know that's true for you, the sooner you can know that you cannot ever drink again in safety, the more free you will be. But nobody has this pathway. So how can I know that about myself? Because everybody wants to just moderate. Everybody wants to just drink on occasion, right. But how can you quickly know about yourself that no, no, no, that is completely dangerous for me and that is not okay and never going to be okay? The sooner you can know that about yourself, the freer you will be.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, so thank you for that. That is such a brilliant visual, the rut. And it's so true. That's absolutely true for every addiction. I mean if you take it to a certain point where you have this incredibly phenomenon of craving when you don't have it, that's that rut going, "Where are you? Come back."

You cannot safely drink or use opiates or use meth. Or for some people the food one is a little tricky. We always have to eat. But you may have to stay away from sugar and flour because it just gets you. Behavioral addictions, there are certain things maybe you have to really put up so many precautionary barriers so you don't get that rut going again, right.

Annie Grace: Yeah.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Share with me any other thoughts that you'd like to share, kind of some other wisdom you've gained along your journey here dealing with addictions and dealing with alcohol.

Annie Grace: I think specifically to alcohol I'd just like to share the fact that when I started talking about my journey and my story, it was overwhelming how many people came out and said, "Oh, wow, me too." And I think it's really unfortunate that it's something that we don't talk about more often because you and I could be sitting here and have some doughnuts or whatever. And we'd be talking about the fact that, "Oh, there are a lot of calories in this. I'm only going to have one." But when it comes to if we were trying to have some cocktails, we wouldn't be thinking about or talking about, "Okay, this is dangerous for these reasons." And I think that's really unfortunate. We've done ourselves a big disservice by kind of separating alcohol out from other addictions.

We don't have cigarette-aholics or heroin-ism or cocaine-aholics. And we have people who become addicted to addictive substances. But somehow, we do

have this other thing. We even say drugs and alcohol. So alcohol's purported as something that normal humans should be able to consume responsibly and naturally. And somehow there's something wrong with you if you can't. None of the science says that. Everything says that the opposite of that is true.

Normal humans with blood, flesh, and bone will get addicted to alcohol if they drink enough of it over time in the right circumstance. That's just definitively true. And somehow, we've obscured the additive nature of it. So I guess the biggest message is just that you're not alone, it's all of us, and that there's nothing wrong with you. You're a cellular organism. So I think we should, as much as we can, let go of the shame of becoming addicted to something that's just purely addictive.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Alcohol is addictive.

Annie Grace: It's like a news flash. We've known this forever.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Right because I mean, boy, I didn't think of that when I was drinking in college and falling in love with beer and all the pleasure we associated with it. It's like you're taking this addictive poison, and you're not even thinking about it. Crazy, crazy, crazy.

I have to read one other thing from your book. This just blows me away it's so good, if that's okay.

Annie Grace: Yeah, of course.

Dr. Paul Thomas: All right. So I'm on page 183. "I now know without a doubt that if I choose to believe I will be miserable without alcohol in my life, I will be. If I choose to believe I can't relax without a drink, I won't be able to. I also know that if I choose to see alcohol as it really is, a toxic, addictive drug that should be treated with caution and doesn't deserve a role in my life, I will have no desire for it. The choice is mine." Wow. "Now that you know the naked truth about alcohol and what it has been doing to you, your body, and your mind, you'll be able to act." So I was going to ask you, how did you come up with the title?

Annie Grace: Oh, I love that question. It's so good. So it's kind of twofold. First of all, I was just looking for something that really encapsulated everything for me. And I was actually having breakfast. And I was eating Bare Naked granola. And Bare Naked granola is granola without any sugar or additives. It's organic, no GMO. It was like just, "Ooh, that's cool. That's what I want my mind to be like. I don't want my mind to have all these pollutants and toxins." And so that was kind of part of it.

But then the bigger part of it really came from my kids. And sort of we're born into the world naked. And my kids, when they walk up and see themselves in the mirror when they were really young, they'd be like, "Hello." They're so excited. And it's so much pure joy and love. And they don't have any conditioning or anybody saying, "There's something wrong with you," or, "You need something else." It just doesn't exist. And so there's no subconscious BS, and there's no pollutants. And there's nothing going in there to say that, "You're not enough," or, "You need this substance to live a good life." And I was like wow, going back to that, just that naked mind, where we're fully accepting of just the gift that is ourselves, and we realize that, yeah, we don't need this stuff. We don't need it to really live a good full life.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah. So back when you were drinking heavily at the end there, did you look this alive and fresh and vibrant like you do today?

Annie Grace: No, no.

Dr. Paul Thomas: No?

Annie Grace: No. Oh, man, I was pulling out pictures because I was on *Good Morning America* in January. And they wanted a bunch of pictures of my drinking days. And I was like oh, geez. I'm going to be 40 in August. And I think I look younger than I did when I was 35.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Yeah, you could pass for 20s for sure.

Annie Grace: Thanks.

Dr. Paul Thomas: So I'm 60—no, 61—and if you saw pictures of me ten years ago—no, 15 was when I quit, so 20 years ago—I looked way older and worse than I am today. I'm a pediatrician as well as an addiction specialist. And kids are just so amazing, right. They come out; they're alive. And they're real. And we lose that along the way. If you're watching this and you're struggling, and you've lost that child-like love of life, right, just that inner joy and all of that, you can get it back. You're looking at two people that got it back. And we want to give you hope.

So Annie, we can wrap it up soon, but I want to give you a chance if you've got any kind of messages for our viewers that might give them some hope, what would you like to tell them?

Annie Grace: Just echo what you said, Paul. I feel like it can feel absolutely terrifying because we do believe. So I believed so definitively that life was going to be miserable without alcohol. I just really thought that that was true. But if you can have the courage to start to ask the right questions and just ask the

questions in general and be really patient with yourself, then it can open up a world that you just didn't even imagine.

The biggest regret I get from readers, from people who have changed their lives by giving up drinking, is, "Man, I wish I would've done it sooner." And I think that's number one. So today's always the best day to make a change.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Today is your day. Draw a line in the sand. Read this book. How else can people get in touch with you?

Annie Grace: So I think the book, obviously, but then the alcohol experiment. AlcoholExperiment.com is the 30-day challenge. And then if you don't want to just go cold turkey day one, but you want some of the stuff, NakedMind.com is my website.

Dr. Paul Thomas: Fantastic. Well we're going to meet each other again, I'm sure. And those of you watching, I just encourage you to join us. It's going to be better. Life's amazing when you can get all these addictive things out of your life and start healing. The whole summit is about different ways of healing, but I wanted you to have this other way of thinking about addictive substances. So thank you so much, Annie.

Annie Grace: Yeah, thank you so much, Paul. It's wonderful.

Dr. Paul Thomas: This has been very powerful. I appreciate it so much.