The Holidays Don’t Save You. Recovery Does.

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Transcript

[00:05] So, we're here for the third segment of the Warriors Heart podcast, sitting down with Michael Odell. Great to have you here, man. Let me give you a quick introduction. We got Michael Odell, Marine Corps veteran, chief operating officer of the Warriors Heart Command Center, public speaker, and motivational coach. Honored to have you here, sir. I appreciate you being here with us today.

Yeah. Thanks, man. Number three, huh?

Number three. Yeah, it's the third one.

All right.

Yeah. Uh we're so far we have surpassed I think Joe Rogan's podcast uh for the second week in a row. Don't look into it or anything. You just take my word for it, but we're doing that good.

Fact find that.

N we'll just go with that. Right. But we're here. It's December 8th today. We're coming up on the Christmas season on the holidays here and we wanted to do a little bit of a podcast to give some people some hope maybe, you know, to try to give them a little bit, right? Uh, but we're here talking about our experiences in life. You know, one of the things that sets Warriors Heart apart from other treatment centers is we're not academics. We have lived this life and we're here talking about your story and your life that brought you through an unbelievable amount of tragedy to come to this place right here today to be able to help other people. So, let's jump into it if you wouldn't mind. Let's let's get right into it with uh how it all started for you, right? When the uh drinking and everything started.

[01:26] Yeah, man. So, uh, like many folks out there, you know, I started I started drinking at a very young age and, uh, I'll never forget the first drink. I've forgotten many others after that, but the first one, uh,

it was it felt like that's exactly what I needed. Like I was I was with a buddy of mine and he he had his first beer. I had my first beer. He hated it and I loved it. And like beer doesn't taste good.

No.

And so I like I knew right then and there like that something something good had happened is what I thought. It's like oh my gosh this is what I needed at the time when I was about 14 15 years old. when I was struggling with depression and anger and home life started kind of, you know, getting a little a little sideways and uh so that was kind of my escape. And um and I just knew then like it changed the way I felt about myself uh in a good way. Like I like I needed to feel uh joy. I needed to feel happy. I needed to feel good about myself. And I didn't until I started drinking and and I started to feel better about myself. And so that kind of that kicked everything off. And as high of a gear as you can at 15 years old, right?

[02:54] Right. Yeah.

But I couldn't wait until that next drink. It might have been a couple weeks, a month, I don't I don't know. But but I was always looking forward to it. like, man, I can't wait for the next time I'm going to have a chance to change the way I feel cuz I'm sick and tired of feeling this way.

The depression, the anxiety, the feeling of isolation, loneliness. You escaped into a bottle, right?

And the reason why we're talking about it today is we're coming up on a time that's stressful for a lot of people being around family, you know, memories, that sort of thing. You know, we talk about holidays supposed to bring joy. You know, you're supposed to have joy every day. Am I right?

Yeah.

Yeah. Uh but we think about it a lot during this time of year and a lot of people want to try to be a part of it. So they end up drinking and participating a little bit too much in that that sort of lifestyle during this time of year. Right.

Yeah. You know there's there's folks out there that are able to do that

and not have it destroy their life and who they are. they they're allowed to they're able to do that and it not impact their relationships, their their work relationships, work environment, kids relationships. Like they're able to do that and not have negative outcomes. There's people out there and like that's awesome. Um for people like me, I am not able to do that.

[04:14] Me neither.

Right. Like that that's that's a fact. I've tried it hundreds of times.

Yeah.

I'm not able to. And uh so I have to acknowledge that and be okay with that. Like it doesn't mean I'm crazy. It doesn't mean I'm doesn't mean I'm this that or the other. It just means like that's not something that I can do. And so if I want to live a good, healthy, happy life full of joy. I can't do that. And there's steps involved in how to not do that. But I I just can't. I'm not that person.

Yeah. Many of us aren't. You know, people that are in sobriety call those kind of people normies. you know, they're normal people and and there's nothing wrong with being able to enjoy that normally and responsibly, but there are, like you said, those of us who can't, right? And that's normal, too. It's it's human. It's human nature for a lot of us, right?

So, the purpose of this particular episode is to kind of talk about what that looks like for the Christmas season, you know, for the holiday season, uh, and to try to help folks find a way through it. But in in getting into your background a little bit, uh, so you started drinking at an early age, you know, 14, 15 years old. Did it ramp up quickly? Like you said, it may be a month or two before you could have another drink. So, when did it really start to take off for you?

[05:27] Yeah. So, so yeah, I started started drinking at a young age and alcohol changed the way I felt

from the first drink and it started to ramp up when I was in my, you know, late teenage years, you know, 16, 17 years old. Uh, I started getting the results of what sometimes takes people a long time in addiction to get. I started getting arrested at a young age.

Uh like the first time I went to jail, I was not even old enough to be in jail.

Oh wow.

It was 15 years old. I wasn't even old enough to be there.

Mhm.

And they didn't the the police officers, the arresting officers didn't didn't believe that I was only 15. Brought me to jail and uh my parents had to come pick me up like and it was for uh minor in consumption of alcohol and public intoxication. and just a normal normal substance abuse results. Uh but it started to ramp up when I was when I was around that age. Ramp up so much to the point where by the time I was joining the Marine Corps when I was 19, so from whatever 15 to 19, just a few years, uh I had already been arrested like 10 times

[06:40] for substance abuse related stuff. Um, and when when I joined the Marine Corps, I was on probation and I remember going down to the recruiter's office and he was like, "Yeah, you ain't got to worry about that, man. I'll go to court with you. You sign the paper here. Well, you're good to go." And so, I was like, "Okay." So, I did that and the recruiter went to court with me and the the the judge expuned my probation or got rid of it uh with the understanding that I was going to join four years active duty in the Marine Corps. It's like,

"Right,

cool. I'm in." Um, and the reason why I wanted to join is because I have a lot of family, a lot of uncles that served, a few that served in the Marine Corps. And, uh, there's just was no other option if I was going to join the military. Like, it it was the Marine Corps. I've got, you know, my dad was in the Coast Guard, my grandpa, uh, was a corman. He's in Korea. So, I've got, you know, family in different branches of the service, but there was no question the Marine Corps was the branch that I had to I had to go to. Yeah.

And uh and so I joined when I was 19 and up until that point, you know, life was already full of chaos. I mean, my mom would would be up at night and uh would wouldn't be able to sleep because she's waiting on a phone call from the sheriff's department to let her know either I was in jail or dead.

[08:01] Yeah. you know, and she was waiting on calls like that when I was 17 years old, 18 years old, 19 years old. And uh when I joined the Marine Corps, she finally had a sense of relief like, "Okay, he's going away, but he's going away to serve our our great country. He is uh going to be in a structured environment. Yes, he's going to deploy, but he's got a greater chance of dying out on the streets living the way he's living than he does in a combat zone right now,

right?

And so there was relief for my mom just in this just in that that I was leaving to go to the Marines.

Well, I could imagine it was, you know, you know, having worked as a police officer and saw the other side of that, dealing with the same kids over and over again and talking with their parents over and over again, I saw it quite a bit, you know, so I understand the reason. That's always my question to people when I'm talking to them about their decision to join the military. Some joined because of adverse childhood experiences, what we call ACEs, you know, a bad home life. Others altruism, patriotism, whatever you want to call it, a family history of serving in the military. So that was your decision. Join the military, join the Marine Corps, and start your life, right?

[09:13] I wanted to be a part of something bigger than me and I knew that I had more to offer this world. But it's like even though I was living in addiction and I was living in chaos, I wasn't happy in my own skin. Like even though those things were were there, I still knew that I had more to offer. I had more to give. Like I I I um I don't have to continue to live this way. Even though I chose to continue to live that way, I knew there was something something better for me. I didn't know what it was. And uh so you know I joined the Marine Corps and uh it was one of I have a few of the best decisions of my life and that that was one of them.

Yeah. So he joined up at 19 went straight into training. I can imagine it was a little bit of a challenge for your recruiter though at some point. Right.

I made it as hard for him as I could.

Right. Now going back to you know since we are coming up on the holidays from talk about Christmas. How did the Christmases look up until that point? I mean, were were you like most people just, you know, an ordinary Christmas or was you getting a little bit lit during the holidays?

[10:23] Yeah, man. So, so Christmas at home, my parents house was a normal Christmas.

Mhm.

You know, gifts under the tree. My mom would get a real Christmas tree from the Christmas tree farm, a Douglas fur every year.

Uh be beautifully decorated, right? All of all of those things. a good meal to follow all the gifts and all of those things. And so it was a joyous time for probably my parents, my my two younger brothers. Um and it should have been a joyous time for me, right? Like literally what there's nothing wrong, you know, in the home. Like there's nothing wrong. Like there's there's love, there's gifts, there's gratitude, there's good food. Like there's nothing wrong. The problem was everything was wrong with me.

Like I I was I was so full of anger, depression, anxiety, fear, like you name it, I was full of it. And it was like uh you heard the saying like mix you can't mix oil and water.

[11:34] Yes. So, so I'm full of all of these negative, very strong negative things and I'm in an environment that is trying to fill the space with good positive things and it just it wouldn't mix. I was not able to let any of that in. And so even though like I sobbriety was forced on me in a sense of uh like I didn't drink or use drugs at my parents house. So we would do Christmas and then I would leave so that I could go do my own thing,

right?

And so I was not able to let any of that goodness in

uh when it should have been let in. I think there's a, you know, there's a lot of a lot of families uh that have loved ones struggling kind of like hope. Maybe this will be this will be the Christmas that things are going to get better. You know, the magic of Christmas.

Yeah.

It's going to get better this holiday. It's going to get better this New Year's. It's going to Oh, no. We're going to have a good meal for Thanksgiving and then we're going to come together, share gratitude, and and it's going to get better. Things are going to get better over the holidays. It's like no, not until that person wants them to be better and then takes steps towards making them better do they get better. Like the holidays for for the alcoholic and the drug addict and this is just my this is my experience, my opinion.

[13:04] But for the alcoholic and the drug addict, holidays don't bring what they're supposed to

because we're incapable of letting them in. Like if I hate myself, I cannot let love in. Can't If I hate if I hate who I am, I can't let love in. You can love me all you want, but if I don't love myself, I can't let it in.

And you're not going to let it out either. There's no love to to give.

How do you even know how to,

right? Like if you can't love yourself and and and begin to love who you are, who you were created to be, how can you even accurately express that to another individual,

right?

You know what I mean?

If I can't express it to myself,

how do I even know what I'm expressing to you is good?

And we spend so much time in that negative cognition, you know, telling ourselves we're worthless, we're no good, we're not going to recover. you know, people would be better off without us. That it it solidifies, right? And that part of us just almost thrives in the chaos and we have a tendency to to bring about the chaos in those situations, right? And ruin it for everybody else in a lot of ways. Um,

[14:15] chaos creators.

Chaos creators. Exactly. Of course, you join the perfect branch for that, right?

Yeah. Yeah. and and simply there you go. And moving forward in life, you know, we won't spend a lot of time on the on the military aspect of it, but I'm sure you were deployed for Christmas and was in training and stuff like that during the holidays, right? Was that a little bit different for you?

Yeah. So, my first I joined in November of 2006. So, my first like sober Christmas like in a long time was uh the 2006 in boot camp. And yeah, it was forced forced sobriety, but it was also forced sobriety that lasted longer than six hours.

You know, it was three months. I was in boot camp for three months,

right?

And uh I thought, you know, the man, the disease of addiction plays so many tricks on the individual's mind. I was I'm in boot camp for three months. I'm not craving alcohol. I'm not shaking. I'm not, you know, I was a full-blown alcoholic up until the day I left to to boot camp, like full on.

[15:19] No seizures, no withdrawals, no cravings. You know, a beer would have been nice, but it wasn't,

you know, I didn't really think about it that much. What I did think about was having it when I got out. It's it's almost like the the knowing that I was going to get to have it again eliminated the cravings, eliminated the the obsession over it because I knew it was coming soon. And uh uh because I was able to go three months in boot camp, I didn't think I had a problem. I was like, "Oh, I'm good. I can go three months. I don't have a problem."

Right? Got it under control. And

not an alcoholic. I went home on leave from boot camp and spent every day drinking and partying. Didn't spend it with my family.

Really?

No. I saw my I It's super It's super shitty, man. But like my family didn't pick me up from the airport. I had someone else pick me up from the airport and I had my mom drop me off at the airport. I don't think I spent any time with her.

[16:22] And how long were you were you?

I was home for like uh 10 days, 11 days.

Oh wow.

I didn't spend any time with her. essentially shutting out the people that care about me the most so that I can spend time with people that care about me the least.

Yeah.

Why? Cuz being around the people that cared about me the most um would have forced the issues that I was facing to come up and surface and I wasn't ready for them to surface. It's easier to surround yourself with people that don't give a You can hide behind it. Oh, absolutely.

Yeah.

Yeah. Now, we could spend, you know, hours talking about your military career, you know, all the things that happened during that time, but suffice it to say, Marine Corps, you were in the Battle of Fallujah, correct?

Yeah, we went to not the Battle of Fallujah, but I I I served in Fallujah in 2007,

right?

And then deployed to Ramani in 2008, 2009 time frame. And I got out of the Marine Corps in 2010,

[17:23] right? And uh you know we uh we lost like my addiction was still fullon

you know like even worse like every single day bottles and bottles and bottles every single day it was it was like almost it was like to the point of no return

and and like I knew that it was at that point I was okay with that.

Life was dark. It was dark. Everything was dark. uh after our Rammani deployment, we lost uh one of our Marines uh to suicide.

We were there for about a month and uh then he took his life and uh had a memorial service there in Ramani and then carried on with the deployment. Uh but like something and I didn't notice it. I think a lot of other folks that were there would probably can relate with me a little bit on this, but I didn't notice a change while we were on that deployment. Like like I said, you're focused. You're running missions. You're doing your job. There's no time to think about it.

No time. Just like how boot camp, there was no time to think about the obsession.

[18:24] When we got back from that deployment, it was life like fell apart. I'm not saying it's because of that, but something happened in me that made things worse, you know, and I spent so my first Christmas in the Marine Corps, I was sober in boot camp. My second Christmas I was in Fallujah sober. And my third Christmas sober, I was in Ramani. So it was like the only the first three sober Christmases uh in my addiction and they were forced.

Not exactly what we think about for Christmas and having a good Christmas, a sober Christmas being in those combat environments like that, right?

Yeah.

Yeah.

But those were some of the th So those were some of the best times of my life uh w with with my brothers serving.

Sure.

Like we decorated a tree with empty packs of Marbor Reds and Grizzly Wintergreen cans. It's how we decorated the tree. Put a bunch of boxes of people sent us boxes of uh or orville red and whatever boxers popcorn.

We put the boxes underneath the Christmas tree so it looked like there was gifts under there. Like we made the most of it. Uh and uh uh we we actually we had some non-alcoholic beer too for a holiday party and that just pissed me off more than anything.

[19:38] I can imagine.

Yeah. It's like, dude, seriously,

that's one thing that I've never tried. It's a slippery slope. Why even go down that route?

That's how I relapsed the first time I got out of treatment.

Really?

My plan was to continue to have non-alcoholic beer so that I can still associate and socialize with with the people because I didn't want I didn't want uh to change my people, places, and things.

Uh so my plan was non-alcoholic beer and I don't have to change any of that. That lasted about 72 hours. Okay. And then it got even worse,

right?

Even worse.

Well, going back to the Marine Corps, you did we're all in the Marine Corps, right? I mean, you didn't get in any trouble. You didn't get arrested and you completed your service, four years service, and got out, right? What led to your your decision to exit the Marine Corps as opposed to stayed in for a career?

Yeah, I did. Uh uh to set the record straight, I did start to get in trouble in the Marine Corps.

Oh. So, I they they did not want me to reinlist. I got out with an honorable discharge, but uh they did not want me to reinlist. So, I was uh I was getting in trouble. I was getting in fights uh out in town. Um I was getting in fights with the staff's on duty. Like, uh life, I'm telling you, life was life was a mess. Uh and and I was I was living it out.

[21:03] Uh the only thing I did good in the Marine Corps was deploy and train. Everything else I did those last two years was was just drink and create chaos.

Yeah.

And uh so they didn't want me to reinlist. I wanted to reinlist to go to Afghanistan for a third deployment. They told me no. And when they told me no, it was like something in me broke again. And and I I was like, "Okay, I guess I'm getting out. I don't know what what the hell I'm going to do, but I'm getting out." So I got out November 2010. Mhm.

And uh and I will tell you that that holiday, that Christmas, that time of the year was not good.

No.

No. Uh-uh. It's even worse.

Yeah.

Imagine that addiction continued to get worse and worse and worse and worse and worse

until you decided to turn and face it. Yeah. So, down the spiral took you down a really dark path. Yeah.

Yeah, man. So, so, uh, I could spend hours and hours and hours telling you about little little situations, big situations, small situations where, uh, there was spiritual experiences that should have changed the trajectory of my life. Uh, and I chose not to allow them to change the trajectory of my life.

[22:22] Mhm.

Um, there's so many cir situations where I think anybody else would have been like, "Hey, man, you know what? Maybe I should stop doing what I'm doing. This isn't working.

Was there anything that made you think that? Any particular event?

I was in a Yeah. So, that winter that I got out of the Marine Corps, uh, I was in a car accident.

Mhm.

I was at the VFW. I won't say where, but I was at the VFW and, uh, was drinking too much and went and did some drugs in the truck and then I took off. I went driving around.

I got, uh, rearended. Um and uh so both me and this lady went went to the hospital. I didn't know I told him my truck. She told her to van. I didn't know what happened. Was in a red truck and um Marine Corps red.

Mhm.

Well, I had Marine Corps stickers all over the back of it. And uh long story short, when we when I finally went to court for this uh my attorney found out that this the victim, this lady, her son had just got out of the Marine Corps as well and was struggling with PTSD and substance abuse. And she pretty much did everything in her power to beg the judge not to charge me completely for the for this accident. And uh so they showed me mercy and grace and uh had some a little bit of restitution and 6 months of probation. It should have been I mean they should have locked me up then.

[23:52] And she rear ended you.

Yeah. I pulled out in front of her.

Oh, you pulled out in front of her.

I pulled in front of you.

I caused the accident.

I was intoxicated.

Uh they should have sent me to prison for that and they didn't. You would think that that would be enough

to wake somebody up. Not for you.

No, not for me, man. You

kept going down that road.

It sucks like sharing that. Like it's hard to share that because it's like it's uh it's super painful to know that I could have killed somebody. I could have taken somebody away from somebody, you know, their kids. Like like her son was in the Marine Corps. I could have taken a Marine's mom away from him because of the that I was doing. And that situation wasn't enough to change the trajectory of of my life.

I went right back to the same booze, the same drugs, the same situations as moments before the accident.

[24:52] Just kept heading down that path and I'm assuming more arrests and

yeah,

stuff like that.

Yeah. From that point on, you know, life continued to just spiral out of control. Continue to get arrested. Alcohol stopped doing it for me

as well. Like alcohol stopped stopped working. It it it uh I mean it stopped working a long time before this, but I started to actually feel like man this I need to step it up.

Mhm.

This isn't working. So I got really really heavy into drugs and uh you know that started to do it I thought. And so from like 2011 until 2016, I was like heavy into drug addiction.

My son was born in 2013.

And I remember telling myself, uh, I'm I'm going to change now. And now I have a reason to change

now. I'm going to change for my kid. I'm change for my kid. I'm going to be the best dad possible. And I genuinely wanted that. Genuinely believed that. Like I I don't think there was anything more in the world that I wanted than to be a good father to my to my son.

[26:03] Mhm.

Didn't work.

Can't change for somebody else. You have to do it for you.

Yeah. Didn't work.

Yeah.

Didn't work, man. I was back at it the next day. And so that didn't work. Many you that So that was 2013 and uh 2014 was worse. 2015 was worse. They all just kept getting worse and worse and worse. So, what was the turning point? You know, what made you really stop and decide to turn it around?

The court systems have finally had enough of Mr. Odell. Thank God they finally Look, man. You know, I'll be this is just talking my experience. Not I don't wish anything on anybody except for sobriety. Just from my experience, I needed serious consequences in my life. I I was given too much grace.

I was given too much mercy. Just because I served in the military doesn't mean I should get grace when I make a mistake.

[27:06] Right.

In fact, the standard should be a little bit higher in my opinion. However, I uh you know, I was given a ton of grace. And so, like I said, I should have went to prison after that accident. That didn't happen. I should have went to prison after the first drug charge. That didn't happen. I should have went to prison after the second drug charge. That didn't happen. Should have went to prison after the fourth DWI. That didn't happen.

Right. I was given a lot of grace and I'm thankful for that. But like like I said, man, I needed me, just me, I needed some pretty severe consequences uh to change. So, I'm sitting in county jail and uh the judge wants to send me to prison for eight years and uh uh for all substance abuse related stuff. I remember going back um back to back to my cell and I started praying. I was like, "God, I'm not a bad person. I know I've made mistakes." It was pretty much like eight years. It's a little steep. I think in my opinion, maybe maybe we could do three years.

[28:16] Hopefully three years.

Maybe we could do three years. Eight years is a little a little steep. And uh I remember praying and just telling God like, "Man, I I'm done. I I'm done. If I could get three years in prison, I will be thankful.

I will change I will change what I'm doing and I'll never look back." So, I go back to court and the judge offers me three years.

And uh that was the first time where I actually took ownership of the that I had created with a good attitude.

Yeah.

First time. First time I finally felt like I can accept the results that I have received from the life that I had created.

I can accept these results. I can accomplish the mission and I can change my life. The mission is go to prison for three years and get my together.

[29:20] Yeah,

that was the mission. And I remember calling my dad and letting him know after court like, "Hey man, uh, judge gave me three years, so I'm going to prison. Um, please take care of my son."

Mhm.

That was it, huh?

Mhm.

Yeah.

And then back to the holiday holiday piece, you know, Christmas. So that was the first sober Christmas I had ever had where I actually felt peace

in a place that's kind of known for chaos in a lot of ways. Prison isn't a nice place. You know,

prison is full of good people and bad people alike,

right?

Okay. Uh, it's filled with people who have all made mistakes,

right?

It is dark. It's dirty. It's degrading. It's uh uh literally one of the worst places in the United States that you could spend your time.

[30:33] Yeah.

Unless you're, you know, being homeless on the streets. That's probably probably worse than prison. Uh but you know, at least if you're homeless, you got a choice to not be anymore.

True.

When you're in prison, doesn't matter how hard you choose to to be free, you're not. And uh that was that was a a big piece to it, too, man, with with like I knew like I signed on three years and I knew that there was a an end date to this period in my life. up until then like I didn't know when the end date was and I and there I tried to end it myself

you know I tried to commit suicide like I I wanted to end my life uh I tried it with booze uh tried it with drugs you know I got I tried it with a gun I got so intoxicated I couldn't even I couldn't even do it

right

you know like I was trying to create an end date to my life and then when I got locked up I knew that there was an end date to this season.

[31:39] Mhm.

And all I got to do is I just got to do my time and uh I got to do it well and I got to finish I got to I got to finish my commitment that I made with my higher power that I would do it with joy. So one thing when I prayed about like God, if you give me this three-year sentence, I will do it, but I'll do it with joy. That was my ask. I didn't ask for it to be easy. I didn't ask for I just I just said that I would if I could get this I'll do it but I'm going to do it with joy. I'm not and I had not had joy. So I don't even know why why I even said that.

Like I hadn't had joy.

Yeah. Like majority of my life at that point.

Well, every bit of that just says something to the uh not not just to your character but also to the turmoil that you were living in, right? that you found peace and joy in a prison cell, right? That that the normal scene that most people would describe as chaos or anticipate as chaos is somewhere that you found the peace that you needed,

[32:42] right?

That was uh you know, I was scared too.

I was scared to go to prison. Like, dude, watch movies, man. You've seen Shaw Shank Redemption, dude. Exactly.

I don't want to go to prison. Like, no, I'm good.

Yeah. Um, but something changed in me, man. Something changed in me when when I was in jail and I made that commitment. Like I said, it was that was the first time that I had made any type of commitment that I I knew that I was going to be able to do it. Uh,

like even when I joined the Marine Corps, like I made a commitment, four-year commitment to our country, serve as a United States Marine. And I knew I was going to make it as a Marine, but I didn't know if I was going to make it four years,

right?

You know what I mean? Like I knew I was going to get the Eagle Globe at anchor, but I didn't know what happened after that.

Like prison, I knew that I was going to be able to do my three years.

Yeah.

Like I knew it.

And then I had another opportunity to change. So I spent the next two years in prison. Mhm.

[33:46] Uh so it was uh the Christmas of 2016 and then the Christmas of 2017 that I spent those two holidays and that entire time I was at peace in prison.

Let me ask you a question. While you were in in uh boot camp, while you were in the core and everything else, you you mentioned that you were thinking about alcohol the entire time. Was that on your mind this time?

No. Weren't even thinking about it?

No. So I I uh I went to treatment. I went to a private treatment center in 2011, I think.

Like it's hard to even remember when I went there. It was around that. It was before my son was born. And um I remember doing the work, everything that the counselors asked me to do. Uh I I did everything, every assignment, uh everything they wanted me to do, I did it all. Um, and I learned a lot. It was like big book boot camp. All right. Like it was I read the whole big book. We're doing assignments out of the big book. I went through all 12 steps in a 28-day program. Like it was it was big book boot camp.

[34:54] Mhm.

I relapsed right after treatment. Non-alcoholic beer is not going to cut it. I relapsed right after treatment. And I didn't and and when that happened, I justified I'm unfixable. Like I went there to prove a point that I'm unfixable.

This program doesn't work. It's not for me.

I'm so unique that there's nothing out there that can fix me.

Terminally unique.

Mhm. Yeah. That's me. So special.

Right.

So when I relapsed, I used that as a justification to continue down that path at even even quicker rate. Like, nope, I'm unccurable. I tried it and I did all the work. Like I I I did it all so that I could say, "No, it's not that." Because someone will tell you, "Well, did you do all your assignments?"

You say, "No." Well, that's why you relapsed.

Yeah.

I I left no margin for error there. I did every single assignment, every goodbye letter, everything they wanted me to do, I did.

[35:59] And I still relapsed. So now I'm unccurable,

terminally broken, whatever. Right. Well, when I went to prison, I started to recall things that I learned in treatment like five years prior, six years prior.

You got nothing to do but think, you know, in a place like that, right?

I sobered up. I started getting clear and I started to remember the 12 steps. I started to remember uh the doctor's opinion. I started to remember the assignments that I did. And I started to remember what it what they said it required of me to be sober.

And so I started working a program in prison. I was reading my Bible and I was reading the big book and I was reading any self-help book I could find.

Mhm.

And that's what I spent my time doing. Uh and then I started I started uh sharing my experience with some of the other inmates. And uh that that proved out to be just a super humbling experience. you know, not only am I in prison, um, but now there's these prisoners coming to me for guidance. And this whole time I think like, dude, y'all have no freaking clue. Like, yeah, just cuz this is my first time here, I should have been here 20 years ago, y'all. Like, I like this it's a miracle that I'm not here for 20 years,

[37:18] but they're coming to me for guidance. And so, I'm just doing what I think is the next best thing. And I'm sharing what I've learned with them. and uh that two years, you know, there's a scripture that says uh the Apostle Paul says that there's a there is such thing as a peace that surpasses all understanding. And I'll let everybody else search up the rest of that verse, but just that part. There's a peace that surpasses all understanding. And uh it finally started to click to me what that meant. It's impossible for me to understand how I could be at such peace in these circumstances or how folks back in history were at peace in certain circumstances that they that they went through,

you know, like the freaking PS, how they how'd they get through that? How the hell did they survive?

Yeah.

Right. There's a there is a peace that surpasses all understanding. And I experienced that. And that's what prison was like. Were people fighting? Yes. Were people getting raped? Yes. Were people smuggling stuff into the prison? Yes. Did I almost get jumped by a a gang? Yes. Like, it sucked. But none of that took away my peace. That's when I knew that I had something that nobody could ever take from me.

[38:45] Yeah. God had some plans for you and he needed to get your attention and that was the perfect place to do it. and you started making better decisions. Now, one of the things you said before, I know you've said before, was you said recovery wasn't one moment, but thousands of decisions. And that was some of the first decisions that really made you change, right? To to be available to the other prisoners that were there. And I'm not going to quote scripture, but Paul spent some time in prison as well, did he not?

Yep.

Yeah. So, I think he knew what he was talking about as well.

Right. So, you get through prison. What happens after prison? Well, first thing be before what happens after prison is what happens when I find out that I'm going home.

Okay.

So, you had asked me, you said, "Were you thinking about the obsession?" Nope.

Not at all.

Not until I found out I was going home.

That's when it kicked in

two years later.

Wow.

Uh-huh. For two years, I had no cravings, no obsession. Like, I was all in. I was diving into self-help books, a big book, 12 steps, talking to people, mentoring people, teaching Bible studies. I was doing all kinds of stuff in prison, man.

[39:55] Now, in a lot of prisons, there's still opportunity for drugs, for alcohol, for stuff like that. Any of that ever cross your mind? Did it ever cross your

They were making hooch and smoking spice. And I saw this one guy die in our dorm. He smoked some spice. It was so hot in the dorm, he he died. He was like 110 degrees in our unit, and he smoked some spice and he died on his bed. He was there for like four hours before the medical came and got him.

People were still still doing their stuff, but I I didn't I didn't want to. Maybe I was scared. I don't I I didn't want to.

Mhm.

But when I found out that I was going home

Yeah.

It came back. So So now So this December, it's a the holiday Christmas gift. I can't remember. It was like December 17th, something like that. And uh I find out that uh hey, pack your You're get on the bus. You're getting out of here. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to be home for Christmas. It's so beautiful. Oh my gosh. My son, I couldn't wait to see my son, hold my son. I had when he came to visit me one time, I didn't have a phone privileges in prison, but my son, my parents brought him to visit me, and we had prison whites on."

[41:11] Mhm. And uh it was a contact visit and so I got to hold him and talk to him and uh he was eating some hot Cheetos.

How old was he?

Three years old. Four years old. He was eating some uh maybe they're just regular Cheetos. He was eating Cheetos.

Mhm.

And he had the the cheese all over his fingers. Well, he gave me a hug goodbye and his handprints were left on the back of my prison white shirt. And I didn't know it until I got back to my dorm and I took it off and I folded it and I saw my son's fingerprints on the back of my uh shirt on the back of my uniform and I folded it up and I tucked it underneath my mattress and like I that was like I held on to that is like hope and uh so then I find out that I'm going home and I I give all my stuff away. Everything tooth like everything. my shower shoes. Like I give everything away and then I get on the bus and it's like like you get chained to another human being. You don't get to just like ride the bus. It's not the school bus. The bluebird is what we called it. You get chained to another human being. You're chained to a man. You're chained to the You're chained down here. If you got to go to the bathroom, by the way, you got to get up and go use the bathroom with your chain mate.

[42:21] Oh, wow.

Uh-huh. Yeah. So, it was a horrible trip. Anyway, so I'm excited to go home and I get to Huntsville unit first. Well, first Connelly unit and then McConnell and then we got to Huntsville. Well, they called me out and I went and I got my clothes, got my paperwork, everything to get out processed. Everybody else got to leave except for me.

They took their clothes back, took their paperwork back, gave me my prison whites back, and walked me back to a cell. I didn't know what was happening. So then I started like getting into doubt, fear, anger, all these things that I didn't experience for these two years start coming back and I have no answers.

Yeah.

Like I'm supposed to be home for Christmas. What the hell is going on? And uh another month goes by, man. I'm floating around TDCJ.

Another month goes around.

Another month. So, you're you're transported to a place where you're supposed to be getting out and they pull you right back in.

[43:25] Pull me right back in for another month.

Another month. Why?

Uh well, yeah. So, why is uh things were just uh the inhome monitor GPS system wasn't hooked up at the house for where I was parole to. So, but they didn't tell me that. So, I'm I'm back in prison for another month, floating around from unit to unit to unit to unit to unit, all over the place.

And uh angry. I can imagine

like angry at everything and uh uh come to find out that's what it was. A month later I got released. Uh but that's when it hit me I'm not cured.

Yeah.

I felt cured. First two years in prison I felt healed.

Mhm.

And then and then that one situation happened and it all came back. I was ready to tear down the world.

Yeah. And uh so then it was like little humility check like okay all right so what I didn't get to go home for Christmas it's not it's not the it's not the first one I missed

[44:26] right you know but I'm not cured I have work to do.

Yeah.

And so I'm so thankful that for that experience because had I have just walked out those gates high on life thinking I was freaking cured the hell would have happened then? Oh, it would have been bad.

I was not ready to work a program when I got out of prison,

right? Because the relapse had already started. You know, those that know relapse, those that know sobriety know that the relapse starts in the mind and you had you were already there.

So, that that one month was probably exactly what you needed to prevent that, right?

100%. I needed to I needed to experience anger again.

I needed to experience frustration, anxiety. I needed all those things to come back, man. Cuz like the reality is is what is sobbriety if you can't handle those types of emotions. You know what I mean? You got to be able to handle those emotions without turning into the bottle.

Emotional sobriety.

The holidays bring that up.

Yeah.

The holidays bring it up. That's what people think. They want to get sober for the holidays. Like, dude, you can't even stay sober outside of the holidays. Like, the holidays do not bring the alcoholic and the drug addict any hope. like they they don't they they didn't bring me any hope.

[45:44] Christmas didn't bring me hope at all. In fact, it gave me a reason to run.

I'm going to go put on my mask,

go show everybody I'm doing great, and then I'm going to leave, take my mask off, and suffer

and be the same person you were before.

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Didn't change me. It's because they don't change anybody. The only way for someone like me to make a holiday better for people I care about, including myself, is for me to change.

Mhm.

That's the only way. Holidays don't change people. People change holidays.

Right.

And for a majority of my life, I changed holidays in a direction I didn't want to change them.

Mhm.

Right. It doesn't matter. Look, like kids, they want your presence. Meaning this presence.

Mhm.

That's what kids want. They want this.

They want you there. They want they want to be able to grab your face and hold you

like, "Dad, mom, look at me. I'm here. Talk to me. Play with me." That's what kids want. That's what changes holidays, right?

When you can do that with your family sober,

changes everything.

[46:45] Yeah. But many people feel that and if it overwhelms them. What would you say to somebody that's feeling overwhelmed by that that notion? and joy, peace, kindness, goodness, all those things are overwhelming to someone who is oil and incapable of letting water in,

right? So, anything like that gets overwhelming. You tell somebody who's who's in it, hey, there's hope. That's overwhelming. Like, what what do you mean there's hope? Like, no, I don't want hope. I don't want hope. I had hope. Hope is gone.

Like, I don't want any hope. I don't want to experience anything else because I'm tired of I'm done feeling. What you're telling me is there's hope for me to be sober and start to feel things again. My whole life all I've ever felt is pain.

Yeah.

Why would I want to feel that again? Like, so yeah, that that does get overwhelming. But since I've been out of prison, I've been at Warriors Heart since 2018. Mhm.

[47:50] And outside of the two Christmases that my son hopefully doesn't remember, but probably has some lifeline moments uh to work through when he gets older. Um he's never seen me intoxicated or high.

My daughter who was born when I was in prison has never experienced dad intoxicated or high.

Yeah.

And so being able to change all of those moments and every moment after that for for one season of like missing a holiday for treatment or you know even hell if you get locked up like dude go do your time like you're it's going to be okay like whatever you got to do to separate yourself from that that environment that substance do it because the two years that I spent in prison I I wouldn't I mean I would do I would do three years, four years. If I knew that the results afterward were going to be like they are now,

[48:53] I would do five years.

Yeah.

Like seriously, like having one good like this Christmas coming up, it's going to be a great Christmas. Having one good Christmas to look forward to, knowing that it's going to be good, knowing that I'm going to be sober, knowing that my kids are going to have joy, knowing that I'm going to be present for them. Like, dude, I would have stayed in prison from 2016 until this summer to to to to know that that's what it was going to be like.

Absolutely. Because it's worth it. You know, it it's worth the joy that you get when you do it sober. And a lot of, you know, there's a lot of people, we talk about this in the office all the time, you know, when we do training and everything, there's a lot of people this time of year that don't want to make the commitment to go to treatment because they don't want to miss it on the holidays. They're looking at it from their standpoint, right? I don't want to miss out on the holidays, but what are you really missing out on? And what gift could you give your family, right? You could give them the gift of peace and joy, you know? Yeah, it's when you're not there, you know, because you're in treatment, you're doing something else and that kind of hurts a little bit, but you know that they're going to be experiencing a little bit of peace and joy themselves, you know, without you there, right? But you're working on yourself. You're getting yourself better. Was it worth the trade-off, do you think?

[50:06] Yeah. Yeah, man. You know, I'm very close to my mom. I love my family. I'm close with my dad now, too. He's a great dude.

Um, the two years that I was in prison, my mom stopped having to pray for my safety.

That's huge.

Yeah.

She shared that with me. So I was I writing a book and I part of that book I asked my mom to write

a page or two of her perspective.

Yeah.

Of how life was with me.

And uh when she wrote it, she she shared that with me in in story form that uh when I went to prison, she she finally stopped having to pray for my safety.

Yeah. It's like this whole for the last 15 plus years, every night you've been praying for my safety. Now that I'm in prison, you can just pray for my well-being, pray for my health, pray for, you know, peace or whatever, but you don't have to pray for my safety anymore because you knew where I was at. Like finally, you knew where I was at at night and that I wasn't dead

[51:24] and that somebody at least was watching over you. Yes.

Yeah.

So would I trade it dude to when you if you are struggling and you have an opportunity regardless of what time of the year it is to go get help.

Yeah. You literally give a gift to your loved ones of peace that they probably haven't experienced in a very, very long time.

Yeah.

Addiction doesn't come up on you like one day life's great and tomorrow you're addicted and need to go to a treatment center. When you need to go to a treatment center, your life is already falling apart. Most likely. Maybe it's not, but I guarantee you if your life's not falling apart, your relationships are.

Mhm. because you're not present with your family,

right?

You can't be present with your family if you're drunk. Because if you're drunk, you're not present,

right?

Doesn't matter if you're there.

So, if you're struggling and you leave to go get help, you give a gift of peace. They know where you're at. They know that you're safe and they know that you're trying your best to to to get your together. There's no better gift than that. Because if you do those things and you do what's asked of you, the program works. I mean, look at us.

[52:45] Yeah.

And the other 3,600 alumni that have come through our program here at Warriors Heart.

Absolutely.

The program works if you're willing to do the steps and follow follow what you're told to.

Yeah.

It works when you work it. When you do that, you give one of the greatest gifts and your family and loved ones could ever ask for.

Yeah. I was in treatment during the holidays. I was in sober living. you know, I technically I guess I could have went home, but for whatever reason, I wasn't able to. So, I was in sober living during Christmas. Was uh a little bit sad because of it. Yeah, I was. But I knew my family was okay. I knew they were having a good holiday. Not every time during the holiday when I'd be drinking that I would go off, but there was always that potential. And that's what put everybody on edge, right? That's what made everybody tense during the holidays. But I wasn't there for 2020. But the holidays since then, the Christmases since then have been so much better. You share a lot about your family around the office and you were sharing a story about your daughter this morning that was that was great. You know, uh talking about the elf on a shelf thing this morning and just that little bit of joy is worth every bit of the pain that you went through because it makes it that much sweeter. It makes it that much more meaningful and that more solid, I think. Right.

[54:00] Yeah. That's that's huge, man. That's huge. And how many of us have have missed a holiday because we had to work shift or because we were deployed or because we were in training. Life still carried on and you still knew that you had more coming. A lot of people think this is their last one for whatever reason. They don't want to miss it.

There's going to be more and the rest of them are going to be that much better.

You know, you just said something. A lot of people think it's their last one. There's a lot of truth to that.

Yeah. uh when you're struggling with alcohol and drug addiction, it today could be the last day. In fact, some of us are using and drinking to make it our last day. Even though maybe we don't really really want that, like we're trying, we're gunning for it. we're we're going for it, you know, and and um like, yeah, this might be your last one, but it doesn't have to be.

Mhm.

[55:01] You know, you know what I mean? Like there's some truth to it. Like, yeah, this could be your last freaking holiday if you don't stop. So, how about you stop and have plenty more? How about like how about that as a result?

Yeah.

So, it doesn't have to be your last one.

Exactly. Now, a lot of times we spend our time talking to the warrior themselves, but we also talk to the family when we're when we're having these conversations, when we're doing these podcasts, when we're doing these things, we're talking to the family as well. I wouldn't I didn't want my family to call me out on my behavior and tell me I needed to get help. But at the same time, that was exactly what I needed. And as soon as they did, the fight was gone and I was ready to get some help. You know, it was a bitter process, but I was ready to get help. What would you say to a family member that's watching this right now?

So, a lot of times I've heard this over and over is uh family members will be supportive because they're afraid of the outcome. They'll be supportive of someone waiting to get help or

[56:09] you know because we like we don't have a family together because we don't trust each other. At some point there was trust. at some point there was love at some you know what I mean?

So we want to believe we want to believe in our people.

So when they say things like we want to buy into it and say like yeah no that that's fine that'll work.

Like if it if somebody is struggling with alcohol or drug addiction and then to add on unprocessed trauma into that mess. And again it doesn't matter what came first like unprocessed trauma and then addiction or addiction and then it does not freaking matter. Mhm.

But when you add all those things together, you get a you get a concoction that uh creates chaos until the person gets help.

There's no holiday that's going to fix it. There's no like there's no special day, you know, like the the special day is today. And so to the loved ones that might be experiencing a little little bit of this, like you gotta if you're gonna wait till after the holidays, then just say then then just wait till after the holidays, but know that it ain't going to get better.

[57:20] No.

So what you're doing is you're accepting whatever chaotic results you're going to get. And if you're willing to accept that, then fine. But but you have to you have to acknowledge that. Like if you're not willing to accept those results, then encourage your loved one to go get some help because it's not going to change until they do.

Right? In a lot of ways, we call it co-signing their

right? We're buying into it. We're trying to make it easy on them in a lot of ways, but we're not doing them any favors.

Like I told you, I was given too much grace and mercy.

Yeah. Give an inch, take a mile, right? Somebody gives me that much slack, I'm going to run with it. I really am. holding them accountable is in the right way obviously is the thing to do. Uh in the last time we had a podcast we uh we talked about having options ready, right? You know, if you want to present somebody with, hey, you need to get some help, you need to get some treatment, here's the place to go. Reach out to us, warriorsheart.com. The phone number to reach admissions 866-955435. Pick up the phone, give us a call. We'll talk you through the process. Whether you're the warrior who needs to come in or the family member who who is looking for help for your loved one, give us a call. We'll do what we can to help you get in and to get that process of healing started. And Christmas or not, the time is now.

[58:38] Yeah.

Time is now. And that is a wonderful gift that you can give your family. Sriiety, peace, hope.

Yeah. Any final thoughts? You know, I like to share this uh a lot and it's u for the for the struggling warrior, the struggling family member, for just for the struggling individual. Uh you've you you're batting 100, meaning you've made it through, if you if you're hearing this, you've

made it through 100% of the worst, shittiest, hardest, most traumatic days of your life. And so the time is now. You don't have to go through another one alone. Like you've made it through 100% of them.

Uh that means you'll make it through this, too.

Yeah.

If you're willing to reach out for help, there's an there's an end to it. It can be a good it can be good,

right? And that quote or the verse Jeremiah 29:11, I'm sure you can quote it much better than I can, but God knows the plans he has for us, right?

[59:40] And you're a testament to that. You really are. the lives that you have changed since you made that decision to get sober and to become a better person has just been unreal, you know, and I can relate to that personally because when I picked up the phone and finally made the call, you were the guy that answered, right? So, I'm grateful that you're here. I'm grateful that you made that decision. And for other people out there that think that they have no purpose left, that they have no mission left, it ain't over yet. Your mission is not over. And yours keeps going. Yours was much bigger than the Marine Corps. And look at what you're doing now. Right. It's huge. Thank you, Mike.

Yeah. Thanks, man.

Yes, sir. Cuz the first thing that they said was, "Welcome