Hi, friends. This is Annie Grace and I'm answering readers' questions. I'm the author of This Naked Mind. Today, I have a question from Mark. He says, "Annie, one thing that surprised me about reaching one year alcohol free this week is fear that as more time passes, the less I'm going to remember why I quit in the first place, fear that I'll no longer be able to distinguish a bad sober today from a bad drunk one and that there will eventually come a time when I need to test it. Has anyone else dealt with this? Any insight or resources you can point me to to help me stay in the course would be greatly appreciated." If anybody has dealt with this, certainly comment below. We'd love to hear what you have to say. It's startling for me because I get lots of these one year or one and a half year messages these days and it's really cool that people have decided to be alcohol-free for such a length of time.

There's four things that I'm going to say on this. I think that, first of all, it's really insightful, Mark, to talk about the fear of a bad sober day because it is so clear to us when we have a bad day that we can blame something and our minds, we look to blame something. If sobriety is the top of your mind and it's something you've been doing and working on and then suddenly you're having a bad day, blaming your sobriety or blaming your lack of alcohol is just such a natural thing for people to do.

I had a woman write me yesterday actually and she was saying that really she's been almost two years alcohol-free and she just can't find her joy and she was wondering what that looks like. She gave me her date and it was two years ago and she was wondering about that. I had a follow up question for her and I said, "Well, when was the last time you really felt joy?" When she sat and thought about it, things had been disrupted in her life for almost a decade and she hadn't actually felt like she'd really been authentically joyful in a decade. Yet, for some reason, her mind was like, "Well, it must be the alcohol." When we were drinking, we could very quickly think, "Well, you didn't use to feel this way when you were drinking." That's just not true because if you put it under critical examination, you felt bad enough to seek change.

As human beings, we don't like change. We don't want to go out of our comfort zone. We don't want to do something that ventures us into the unknown where we won't know what's next. To feel bad enough to actually seek change in your relationship with alcohol means that you were not happy. I think just thinking about that critically. It's so easy I think for our brains to trick us in a way to say, "Oh, but when I was just able to reach for a drink this would have been all better and I just would have had an outlet and I just was happier."

We remember stuff through this rose-colored haze of things that are not necessarily real or true and this is one of those things that really can trip us up and it trips us up more so as you pointed out, Mark, when we have longer time between the last time we drank and today because it's harder for us to remember. I think it's just really insightful but I also think, yes, that is something that many people deal with and it's something that we just have to be on our guard and aware
about because it's just not true.

The second thing you say is you say, "There's going to come a time where I feel I need to test it." I think testing is an interesting, interesting concept. I'm not opposed to test. If you read my book, I actually tested this on myself. I was feeling quite restless four months into my own alcohol-free journey and feeling like I wanted to know the truth. I wanted to know how getting drunk made me feel, how feeling tipsy made me feel, what exactly it felt like. I'm not opposed to test but I do caution you that this can become an excuse. It can become something where you're like, "Well, I just want to test it." Then, all of a sudden, you're on the beach on vacation and you're like, "Well, I'm just going to test it today." Well, guess what? That's not going to be a fair or accurate test. Or you're just at the pub with some people. "I'm going to just test it right now. I'm just going to test how alcohol feels."

You need to go into this test, in my opinion, really honestly and intentionally and very well thought out. Apply some scientific theory to this. Number one is document it. I would do it with video, if at all possible. We all have iPhones. We can all take video but videotape yourself as the night goes on. Number two, don't let there be any just one variable, the only variable that can happen is that you're getting drunk and that you're drinking. You can't be that you're also at the beach or on vacation or hang out with some really good friends or you're at a concert or you're watching a great show. It has to just be one variable.

If you go into the test with that intentionality, this test is going to show you that, yeah, it will give you all the fodder in the world. It certainly did for me for the fact that I didn't want to drink anymore. Even now, thinking back on those videos I took, there's no question in my mind that it wasn't the alcohol that was making me happy. It really delineated and separated how alcohol makes me feel which was not very good and the things that truly bring me joy. I certainly don't discourage testing. I would just say don't slip into a test. Don't use a test as an excuse that you're just out somewhere and now suddenly you're going to test it because it just won't be fair. It won't be accurate and it will certainly give you false results if I can say that.

I've been reading this book called Rewired by Erica Spiegelman and there's a bit in it that I think is really interesting when it comes to testing and finding this for yourself. She talks about the word "authenticity" and she says, "Authentic is a combination of Latin and Greek words meaning coming from the author and one who acts independently. It means accurate, trustworthy and reliable. When your authentic voice can be trusted, there's actually no need to look elsewhere for guidance. No guru, therapist, teacher or bestselling author can give you better answers than the ones you end up finding within. There can be no permanent change without awareness of yourself as unique in all the world. That's because no people will ever think, feel or live exactly alike and the authentic voice will always be more accurate, more informed to your situation than any cookie cutter advice or program. In this way, you can begin to think of this journey through change as an adventure, a deep self-exploration, a journey to your core."
I just wanted to quote that because I think it’s so accurate for this idea of testing. Testing is not something that you should do without deeply introspecting and deciding what’s important to you. If it’s going to devastate you that you lost 365 days and you can no longer say authentically that you haven’t drank for a year, don’t test. It’s just not worth it.

I think one of the most interesting things is that when you think about the test not as just an excuse or not as just, "Oh, maybe I’ll test it someday when I’m here or there or the mood strikes me," but you put the authentic, scientific rigor into it. So often you already know what happens and your desire for testing just goes away.

Then the last thing I’ll say on this is that it will pass. It will certainly pass. I think this is very typical for one year in. A little bit of the honeymoon phase is wearing off and you’re adjusting to just life and this is just life and life has ups and downs and good days and bad days. I remember feeling this myself. About a year in and I was finally feeling good enough to start the journey ... Well, it’s about nine months in so it passed a year when I was really getting off all the antidepressants that I had been on for years and years.

I was on this just sharp emotional roller coaster and so many things were going absolutely nuts for me in my life and I started very quickly and easily saying, "Oh, well, I used to feel so much better when I drink." It was the easiest thought for alcohol to be what was to blame. But when I got through it and when I looked back and I critically ... The truth is I was giving alcohol far too much credit. Really, it’s just a substance in a bottle that makes your brain acts slower and dulls your senses and doesn’t do much for you. To think that it was to blame for my lack of joy or happiness or fulfillment or anything like that, it just was giving alcohol far too much credit and it’s actually absurd. I will say that this is typical. It will pass.

I’d love to hear from people below that if you’ve reached a milestone, a long period of time, a year in your journey, you’ve been through all the experiences, you’re no longer quite on your toes about it because, "Oh, yeah, it’s New Year’s." Well, I’ve done that before. "Oh, yeah. It’s my birthday." Well, I’ve done that before. "Oh, it’s this vacation." Well, I’ve done that before. You start to feel this nervousness that well ... Well, I even remember why I quit. We’d love to hear from you if there’s other things that you’ve done that have been really helpful. Thank you so much, Mark. What a wonderful question and have a very good day.

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