

## TRAPPED BY DRUGS, NOW I'M FREE!



**M**o Timbo was about 12 years old when he became fascinated by the drug dealers he saw outside his home in South East London.

"[They had] these thick, white gold chains and bracelets, watches, cars," he shares in a Holy Production UK YouTube video.

"In my mind this was a picture of masculinity. This was what it meant to be a man. To be a man you had to have the nice chain, the nice car, the nice girls."

His fascination quickly turned into motivation to achieve what these men had.

Despite being a good student who didn't really get into trouble, Mo started hanging around with the wrong crowd.

When he started attending high school, things started to escalate. His school was between two rival gangs.

"I was used to seeing all this fighting and all these gangs and so I got sucked in," he shares. "Not only did I get sucked in, I wanted to be part of it."

At 13 Mo started smoking cannabis. By 15 he was selling weed and getting involved in gang fighting and stealing.

"There was such an adrenaline rush from this life of crime. I felt alive. I felt like a man, and so I

started chasing that feeling more and more."

Things took a serious turn however, when a friend was shot and killed during a fight with a rival gang.

Mo says he learnt a lesson that day: "This is not a game. This lifestyle is going to either take me out

or it's going to put me in jail."

"Instead of leaving the street life, I decided that I need to be even worse," he admits. "I needed to become more of a gangster... I started becoming a little bit more aggressive. I started carrying a knife on me all the time."

Mo was still only 15 when he was

stabbed in the arm and back during a fight. The knife only narrowly missed his spine.

Still Mo continued in this lifestyle. By 16 he was selling crack cocaine and heroin. Eventually he built up his own drug business, making £4-5,000 a week and buying flashy cars, gold chains and guns.

At 19 Mo made the mistake of selling drugs to an undercover police officer. He was caught with thousands of pounds of crack cocaine and heroin on him. He was taken to a holding cell and told he was looking at five to 10 years in jail.

• Turn to page 2

## Following in my father's footsteps

BY JOANNA BREault

**E**ighteen-year-old Aaron Cosar stood cursing at his father's fresh grave site, a bottle of vodka in his hand.

"You weren't supposed to die!" he yelled. "You were supposed to help me get off this stuff!"

But Aaron wouldn't be set free of his addiction until another death had occurred – one by his own hand.

### An awkward photo

Aaron had taken his first sip of vodka when he was nine. He was kicked out of high school for being intoxicated on school grounds. When he was 17, he got drunk and assaulted his father in their front yard while his siblings watched through the screen door. From then on his relationship with his father was never the same.

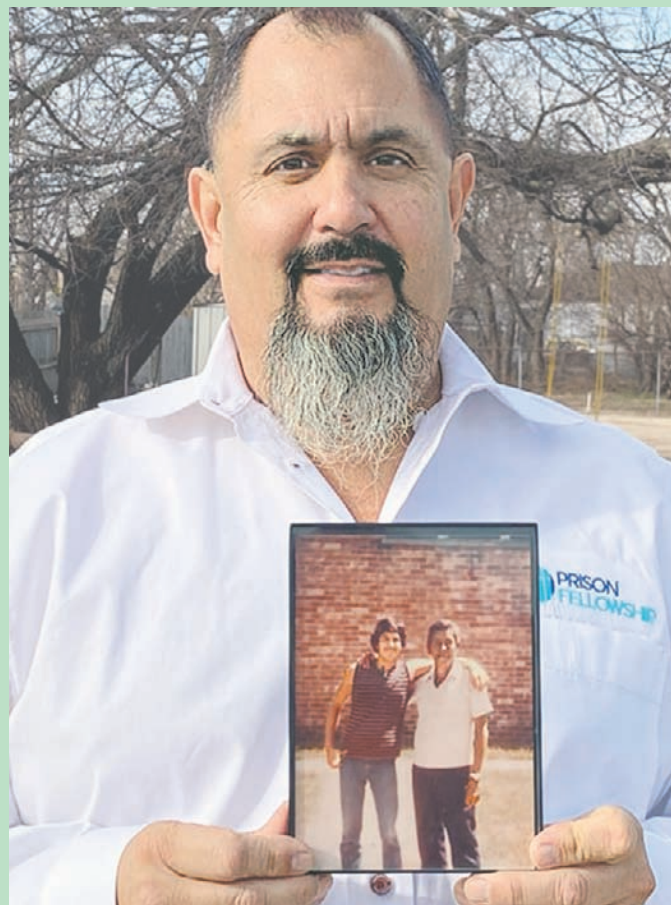
The day before Aaron's dad died, he came to visit Aaron at a juvenile detention center where he was being held for theft. Although Aaron wasn't in the mood to smile for a camera, his dad insisted that his mom snap their photo.

His father was a faithful provider and church deacon who read his Bible daily – but he never said "I love you" or attended Aaron's football games. Aaron felt rejected. And his dad was deeply distressed by his son's destructive choices.

After his father's death, Aaron's downward spiral accelerated. He got into fights and sold cocaine and stolen firearms to fund his addiction to drugs and alcohol.

"Did I want something better?" Aaron asks. "I'm sure I did. But when all I had known was just to drink and use drugs, I had no other vision."

When Aaron was 19, after a night of bar hopping and dropping acid, he ended up at the home of a man who mentioned owning guns. Aaron



Aaron's awkward photo taken while he was in juvenile detention, the day before his father died.

Christians who came to share the love of Jesus. Still, he resisted giving everything over to God.

God used two moments in time to capture Aaron's attention. Aaron had told his two young sons that he would do all he could to come home. But in reality, he had been fighting in the yard – an infraction that works against early release. One day, he was deeply struck by the awareness that he had been lying. He no longer wanted to be the kind of man who would deceive his children.

Another day, while walking on the ballfield, Aaron considered a new "opportunity."

"I was going to start running drugs in the [prison] system," he says. "The Holy Spirit said these very words to me, as I'm plotting in my mind. I'll never forget this. He said, 'The choice you make today will be the one you die with.'"

In that moment, Aaron knew he had heard God. He also knew he didn't want to die in prison. He entered a drug treatment program and joined a Prison Fellowship Bible study, learning all he could about God. He eventually became a chaplain's clerk, a role he held for 15 years.

### A new calling

Throughout his stay in prison, Aaron kept that photo his mom had taken long ago. One day, a rehabilitation treatment specialist asked him about his father, and then she commented, "Did you ever think that God gave you that picture with your dad so that you would know that your dad was saying he was okay with you?"

Aaron broke down.

• Turn to page 2



# TRAPPED BY DRUGS, NOW I'M FREE!

• From page 1

Mo realized his life had gotten out of hand. "I looked up at the ceiling and there was a sign that said, 'Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? At that moment I said in my heart, 'I'm tired of this life. I'm 19 years old and I've been stabbed multiple times, I've lost my best friend, I've been shot at two times, I've been raided by the police on numerous occasions.' I looked at my life, thinking 'This isn't what my life is supposed to be like.'"

At the time Mo was dating a girl who had told him about Jesus Christ and how his life could be different if he followed Him.

"So when I was in the prison cell I prayed, 'Jesus, if You're real like my girlfriend's telling me, get me out of this police station and I'll give my life to You forever...' When I prayed in that cell, the police opened the door and they said, 'You are free to go on bail.'"

Mo immediately called his girlfriend and explained what happened. The next Sunday she took him to church.

"I sat in the church and the preacher said, 'It doesn't matter what your life has been like, Jesus can save you. It doesn't matter if you've just come out of prison, if you've been involved in gangs, Jesus can save you.' He was preaching in a room filled with people but it was like it was only for me... He said, 'If you are here and you want to give your life to Jesus, raise your hand' and that day I repented.

“  
My life was different.  
”

"I gave my life to Jesus Christ at the age of 19 and I felt different... What I felt that day was deeper than the drugs that I've smoked. What I felt that day was better than the clubs that I've been to, the champagne I've bought, the cars... I made a decision that day, I said, 'I'm going to give my life to Christ forever.'"

Mo left London, realizing that he needed to be away from his old friends and his old life.

"For nine months I was in this church – I was learning how to pray, I was learning how to be a disciple. My life was different. I stopped smoking weed, stopped clubbing, stopped drinking."

Despite these changes, Mo still had to face up to his past mistakes. He was sent to prison, where he served three years.

"I made up my mind that while I was in prison, I was going to evangelize to all the prisoners ... By the time I left that prison over 600 men had given their life to Jesus."

A month after his release, Mo married his girlfriend. They had two children and Mo later became a church pastor in the north of England before the family moved to France.

"If you feel like you're trapped in a cycle – maybe it's drug addiction, maybe it's gang warfare, maybe it's depression – I want to give you the good news that the same Jesus Christ that delivered me, is the same Jesus Christ that can deliver you." •



Which dog are you feeding the most?

# How to win the battle within

BY SHANE IDLEMAN, CP GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

**DAN** Delzell, in a riveting blog from a decade ago titled, Google Executive's Tragic Death Sends Somber Warning, wrote the following:

"How do you go from being a devoted father of five and a successful Silicon Valley executive, into a 51-year-old man convulsing from a fatal dose of heroin on your 50-foot yacht, with a prostitute walking over your dying body to take a final sip of wine before leaving you to die?"

He then presented the question, "How do tragedies like this take place?"

**One step at a time**

First, the enemy rarely pushes us off the cliff, so to speak. We're often led down one step at a time, one compromise at a time, one wrong choice at a time.

For example, the enemy doesn't show a couple the pain and anguish and the years of regret that adultery brings; he deceives them with the temporary enjoyment of sex and a false sense of freedom from responsibility.

If the full story was known beforehand, no doubt different choices might have been made. We're often not shown the pain that sin brings, we're enticed by the temporary pleasure.

**The battle within**

Galatians 5:17 says that the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what our sinful nature desires, and that these two influences, are constantly fighting against each other.

As a result, our choices are rarely free from this conflict. In other words, our sinful nature and our new nature in Christ are constantly at war.

Don't be alarmed. The fact that there is a fight confirms the value of our commitment.

**An unforgettable analogy**

A story I heard illustrates this truth: "A young man, determined to find help for his troubled life, walked to a neighboring church. He told the pastor that his life was meaningless and in constant turmoil. He wanted to make better choices but couldn't.

He described the conflict: "It's as if I have two dogs constantly battling within me. One dog is evil, while the other is good. The battles are long and difficult; they drain me emotionally and mentally."

Without a moment's thought, the pastor asked, "Which

dog wins the battles?" Hesitantly, the young man admitted, "The evil dog." The pastor looked at him and said, "That's the one you feed the most. You need to starve that dog to death!"

**What we embrace eventually embraces us**

One of the reasons why men and women struggle with lust or anger is because they feed those emotions continually throughout the day. It's difficult to avoid illicit sex and outbursts of anger while continually watching media programs that promote them.

As a matter of fact, many cases of sexual violence can be traced directly back to pornography. What we embrace eventually embraces us. "The more we follow that which is good, the faster and the further we shall flee from that which is evil" (Matthew Henry).

**Who controls you?**

Romans 8:6 says that if our sinful nature controls our mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls our mind, there is life and peace. With God's help, you'll begin to control your thoughts instead of allowing your thoughts to control you.

For those who are skeptical about the media's influence, consider why companies spend millions of dollars on commercials. They obviously understand the concept of "suggestive selling."

**Why walk willingly into the enemy's camp**

In the end, the choice is yours when it comes to what you watch and listen to, but why would you willingly walk into the enemy's camp? Why would you feed wrong desires and thoughts when they do nothing but war against the soul?

If you're questioning God's existence, experiencing violent outbursts of anger, struggling with addiction or lust, or continually feeling depressed or discouraged; evaluate your diet of television, movies, the Internet, music, friends, and your thoughts in general.

Are they lifting you up, or pulling you down? Commit your life to God and develop a powerful devotional life that consists of prayer, worship, and reading and studying the Bible. This is how you win the battle within. •

Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California, just North of Los Angeles. Shane's sermons, articles, books, and radio program can all be found at shaneidleman.com or wcfav.org. He is the author of Feasting & Fasting, If My People, Desperate for More of God, and Help! I'm Addicted. Follow him on Facebook at: facebook.com/confused-church. You can also follow Pastor Shane on the new free speech platform Parler https://parler.com/profile/ShaneIdleman/posts.

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

**ACROSS**

- 1 Winged angels
- 7 Dog's sharp bark
- 8 Causes wheat allergies
- 10 Cathedral alcove
- 11 Ruble fractions
- 13 Too awful for words
- 16 Canal site
- 18 Apartment
- 20 Thyroid enlargement
- 21 Continental money
- 22 Staying alive

**DOWN**

- 2 What 'SOS' means
- 3 Interest amount
- 4 Teller's boss (4,7)
- 5 Shortness of sight
- 6 Criticism

1	2	3	4	5	6
7				7	
8		9			
10			11		12
13			14		15
16	17			18	19
20			20		
21					
		22			

- 8 Unfairly raise a house price
- 12 Slender
- 17 Shade of blue
- 9 Takes habitually
- 14 'Grand' instruments
- 18 Pacific island nation
- 15 Boxing prize
- 19 Diva's solo

**SOLUTIONS PAGE 7**



"Acorns or chocolate cake?"

5			9		
			3		5 8
		4		8	7
	6 1		2		
4 8					5 2
			6	7 1	
	1	3		4	
	9 5		8		
				2	
					8

## Journey to truth

A poem by D. Utting, Acacia Prison, Western Australia.

Fractured bodies, shattered lives,  
broken heart, a mother's tear  
In my life I have been the cause of all  
these things  
I paid only a drop of my debt by being  
in a cell for 27 years  
I was never willing to accept  
responsibility for what my life brings.  
  
I once read about a Man, calling for  
repentance  
"Prepare the way for the Lord, make  
straight paths for Him" (Matthew 3:3)  
What did He know – He hasn't done my  
sentence  
How can He claim to take away my  
most grievous sin?  
  
I looked to this Man once my life had  
fallen into hell's pit  
I see now that indeed this Man more  
than walked my path  
"The Lord is close to the broken

hearted and saves those who are  
crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18)  
This Man truly suffered so I could avoid  
God's wrath.  
  
I did not know this Man even knew of  
my plight  
I thought I suffered alone but He  
suffered right along beside me  
"The people walking in darkness have  
seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2)  
From this day forward I will worship  
Him and to Him alone I will bend my  
knee.  
  
I still am not worthy of His grace – yet I  
am still bathed in it  
I am beneath His notice – yet He walks  
beside me every day  
Within me, now and forever, dwells His  
Holy Spirit  
"By grace you have been saved,  
through faith." (Ephesians 2:8)

With this poem I bring word that you  
can trust  
"Death is the destiny of everyone,  
the living should take this to heart"  
(Ecclesiastes 7:2)  
"We tell you the good news, what God  
has promised our ancestors, He has  
fulfilled for us" (Acts 13:32)  
Don't be the fool I was – let nothing  
keep you and God apart.  
If you think you have succeeded in life  
on your own – you haven't got a clue  
There is no other who should be more  
highly adored  
"If on some point you think differently,  
that too God will make clear to you"  
(Philippians 3:15)  
"The wages of sin is death, but the gift  
of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus  
our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

# I FORGAVE MY ABUSIVE MOM

Demetrius Guyton was two months old when his mother tried to kill him.

She laced his bottle of milk with hydrochloric acid so she could cash in on a \$25,000 life insurance policy. Miraculously, Demetrius survived but was left permanently scarred, a constant reminder of what his mother had done.

"I hated my mother," he admits in an interview with CBN. "I resented her very bad and it was horrible."

His mother was sentenced to 15 years for first-degree assault.

Aside from the scarring, Demetrius' nose collapsed due to the attack, leaving him with no nasal passages.

"I went through two years of intense surgical attention," he explains in his book, *The Chosen One: A Touch from Above*.

Then Demetrius' world changed again. "I was given into custody of some very, very hateful foster parents.... My only meal would be multiple slices of light bread."

He lived with three other boys there, including his own brother, although he didn't learn that they were related until later in life.

When he was five years old, Demetrius went back to live with his grandmother. At school he faced ridicule, abuse and rejection.

"It was very terrible for me growing up because I had to deal with a lot of bullying, a lot of low self-esteem, a lot of everything that comes with being ostracized and alienated."

As a teenager, Demetrius started using drugs and joined a gang. Strangers who stared at his scars were often met with Demetrius' violent anger.

As a result, he was in and out of juvenile detention on assault and battery charges.

When he was 20, Demetrius caught his girlfriend cheating on him.

"Being rejected like that and betrayed took me to a horrible, horrible place of anger," he says.

He attacked the man he found her with and police arrested him on attempted murder charges. He was given a life sentence.

Demetrius worried about the attention his scars would bring behind bars but he was quickly befriended by a Christian inmate.

As a high school dropout, he never learned to read or write but his new friend taught him using the Bible. The more Demetrius read the Bible, the more he wanted to know about God. One night he was praying when he heard God speak to him: "I love you and I want to use you."

Demetrius started telling others about what had happened.

"I began to share transparently about how angry I used to be, how I used to hate Jesus, how [I used to think] He wasn't real and how even though I'm in this jungle He appeared to me and He's real."

Demetrius told CBN about a visiting speaker who had previously been cellmates with a woman who tried to kill her son.

"She was saying about this lady



Demetrius' mother laced his bottle of milk with hydrochloric acid.

that had poisoned her son and she came to a place where she finally forgave herself and the speaker used that as a testimony of truth to try to empower us to forgive ourselves."

After the meeting, he spoke to the woman and confirmed that the woman she was talking about was his mother.

The speaker told Demetrius that Jesus had a purpose for his life. It was then that Demetrius finally surrendered his life to God.

"I fell on my knees and I began to cry out, tears began to leak out of my eyes: 'First of all, God thank You for manifesting Yourself to me and showing me that You are real. Second of all, thank You for dying for me and shedding Your blood for me. Third of all, forgive me for all of my sins and help me to live for You.'"

As he prayed, Demetrius felt peace and joy wash over him.

Demetrius was granted early parole for good behavior and released after five years. Immediately, he found his mother and told her he forgave her.

"All I wanted to do was just tell her, 'I love you. I forgive you.' She fell on her knees and began to weep towards Jesus, thanking Him that I was alive, thanking Him that I had forgiven her." •

Demetrius Guyton has now reconciled with his mother.



Aaron now works full-time as a Prison Fellowship Academy program manager.

# Following in my father's footsteps

• From page 1

He had never considered that his dad's desire to have their photo taken together spoke of love and forgiveness.

"That was enough to forgive myself," Aaron recalls, wiping away tears.

Aaron even found love while in prison. He and Justeen met when she came to visit a friend's husband. To her surprise, God impressed on Justeen's heart that Aaron was to be her husband, and she began writing letters to him. They fell in love and married, enduring six parole denials and 13 years apart before he was released in November, 2010. Aaron's sentence had been commuted to 65 years by the governor of Oklahoma, and he was released after 25.

### Carrying on a legacy of love

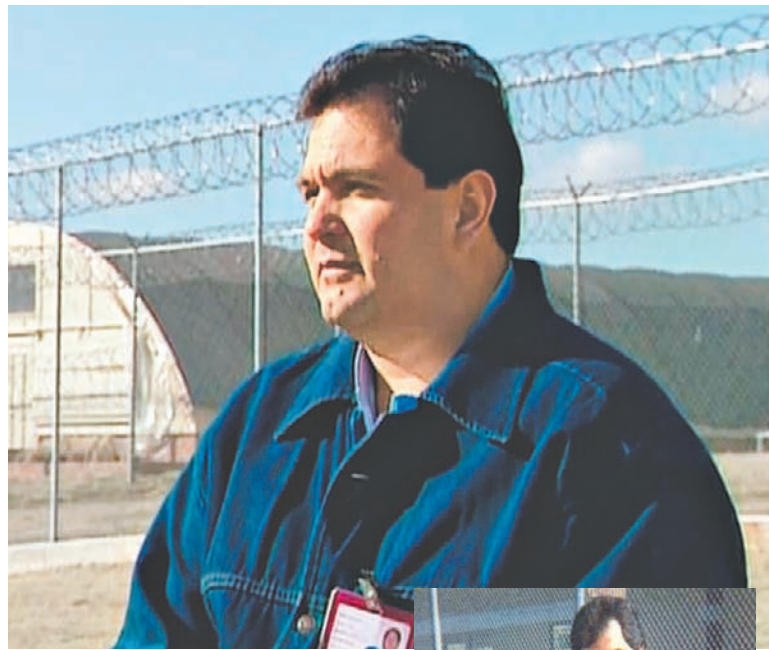
Now, at 55, the once lost and angry young man has a sense of purpose in his life. Aaron works full-time as a Prison Fellowship Academy program manager. He also works one-on-one with prisoners to help them explore their own stories and receive healing from God.

### In his father's footsteps

At the time of his father's death, the church deacons presented Aaron with a cane representing his father's legacy of godly service.

They said to Aaron, "You know what your responsibilities are," meaning to carry on in his father's footsteps.

Aaron wasn't ready at the time, but



37 years later, he is doing just that.

Following his release from prison, that keepsake was one of the first things Aaron retrieved.

And the photo from the juvenile detention center hangs by the front door of his home, the last thing Aaron sees before he goes out to serve Christ each day.

"This is what I watched my dad do – go to churches, go visit somebody in the hospital," Aaron says.

"Here I am. I'm out now and doing the same thing. So, I'm a lot like my dad, and I'm proud of that." •

The original of this story can be found at [www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org) and it is used with kind permission.



Aaron when he was in prison. INSET: Aaron and his wife Justeen in 1999.

## About Crossroads

The Crossroads Prison Ministries mentorship program connects you with mentors who help you study the Bible.

Mentors write to you, answer your questions, share stories from their own lives, help you see how God is speaking to you through His Word and encourage you to continue to grow in your faith.

Through the mentorship program, Crossroads offers more than one dozen different correspondence Bible study courses that each contain up to 14 lessons.

Each course is designed to help you learn more about God and how to follow Him.

If you are interested in joining the program, please fill out the attached application form and mail it to us today!



Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
First Last

ID #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Earliest Release Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
MM DD YYYY MM DD YYYY

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Complete Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by: CHAL Institution \_\_\_\_\_ Housing \_\_\_\_\_

Prefiero el curso en español. Street or PO Box \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

### STUDENT COMMITMENT

I will finish each lesson I receive in a timely manner and, with the help of my mentors, I will complete each course that I start. I agree that Crossroads may use anything I submit, such as my picture, testimony, writings or artwork, for promotional purposes or to further its mission.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

When you have completed this form, please return it to:  
 Crossroads Prison Ministries | PO Box 900 | Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900  
 Crossroads Prison Ministries Canada | PO Box 5037 | Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

# MICHELLE IS LIVING IN THE LIGHT



BY JOANNA BREAUULT

To her neighbors, Michelle's life looked picture perfect. She and her son's father lived in a five-bedroom home on several acres of land. On the weekends, they socialized with their friends, and zoomed around on their snowmobiles or four-wheelers. Her daughter was off at college and they had a son at home.

But beneath the surface lay horrific memories and deep guilt. A traumatic childhood. An abortion Michelle hadn't wanted. Drug abuse. And now – a long-term relationship that was falling apart.

### Secrets concealed

Like the one she had created, Michelle's family of origin looked good on the outside. But her mother was an alcoholic whose depression

*Since her release from prison, Michelle has paid back all the money she owed after committing tax fraud and tax evasion.*

overshadowed their home. Michelle's father, whom her mother had divorced when Michelle was six, was also an alcoholic and frequently violent.

Growing up, Michelle endured physical and sexual abuse but did not tell a soul. At 13, she began numbing her pain with alcohol and promiscuity.

"It came from wanting to be loved," Michelle explains.

Michelle's adolescence was one of risk-taking and living in the moment. But when she got pregnant at age 19, she decided it was time to settle down.

She took a job doing the books for a local business. In 1988, she married her baby's father, a man 13 years her senior. But he turned out to be much like her own father – angry and abusive.

When she unexpectedly became pregnant a second time, he forced her to get an abortion. Michelle became suicidal, and they divorced after 10 painful years together.

Then Michelle became involved with a much younger man. She loved their life of fun and the new son they welcomed into the world. However, they became entangled in drug addiction, and after a while, he became abusive. In 2006, Michelle asked him to leave. Later, she discovered he had been unfaithful with her best friend. She was devastated.

### One bright spot?

Michelle's work life was a bright spot amid her painful relationships. A talented accountant, she found it fulfilling to help grow a small business to a multimillion-dollar corporation over 20 years. But the financial practices at work had always been a little shady. The business didn't always track cash payments, and employees were compensated both legally and under the table. Voluntary audits were unheard of.

Around the time Michelle separated from her son's father, her boss directly asked her to help him hide money.

"He'd say things like, 'You need me. You don't have a college degree, so you'll never get another job that pays what you make here. And that guy you live with – he's a loser. But I'll take care of you,'" she recalls. "I helped him break the law. I helped him commit tax fraud and tax evasion. It was our secret."

At the same time, Michelle was determined to hold on to the one thing that seemed stable in her son's life – their home. She started paying personal bills with a company card and taking advances she promised herself she'd repay.

Several years later, the business was audited. Knowing she would likely be indicted, Michelle began to attend church, hoping it might garner favor with a judge.

At church, she made a friend named Sue who urged her to come clean. Michelle thought the way Sue talked about God being the answer to her pain sounded crazy. But, exhausted and empty, she did as Sue suggested: She told the truth. She was arrested in August 2010, and the judge gave her two to six years for grand larceny.

### The words of a child

Right away, Sue and three other women from church began regularly visiting Michelle and sending her letters. Their church participated in Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree, which delivers gifts to children on behalf of their incarcerated parents. Sue made sure Michelle's 11-year-old son received a gift. Sue also invited Michelle's son to church, where he heard and responded to the Gospel.

During their weekly calls, Michelle would read to her son, doing her best to keep nurturing his mind. In turn, he shared truths he was learning at Sunday school.

"He started telling me about Jesus," says Michelle. "My son led me to Christ."

As Michelle grew in Christ, she started facing the pain that lay beneath her poor choices.

"When I was in prison, it was the first time that I was allowed to get real with my feelings," she says. "I was able to look at myself as Jesus does, as a child – and to love that child in me and heal the hurts of that child."

### Living in the light

Since her release in 2012, Michelle has started her own ministry, Beacon of Light, that helps ex-prisoners, and she has repaid all the money she owed. She owns her own home, and she is passionate about financial transparency. She has required her son to file tax returns since he started mowing lawns at age 14. Beacon of Light is audited yearly. In Michelle's mind, in the light is the only place to be.

The original of this story can be found at [www.prison-fellowship.org](http://www.prison-fellowship.org) and it is used with kind permission.

**"But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."**

**1 John 1:7**

## Violent man's transformation

John Lawson knew what it was like to be locked up before he had ever gone to prison. At the age of 10 his father locked him in their home alone and left, never to return. It was four days before he was found by some friends, hungry and scared.

As an adult, John experienced a different kind of imprisonment when he was jailed for five years for extortion. But it was there he says he found true freedom, which set his life on a new path.

In an interview with 100 Huntley Street, John says as a young child his family seemed perfect.

He and his younger brother lived with their police officer father and their mother, who worked in an upmarket store. They had immigrated to South Africa from Scotland and they loved the outdoor lifestyle.

Then John's grandfather was diagnosed with terminal cancer and his mother and brother rushed back to the UK. John stayed in South Africa with his father so he could continue at school.

At the end of term, John's father picked him up from school, took him home and told him he had to work late. He locked John in the apartment and abandoned him for a new life with his mistress.

When family friends called John's house, he answered and his distress was obvious. They came to the apartment and broke down the door. John was put on a plane and reunited with his mother and brother.

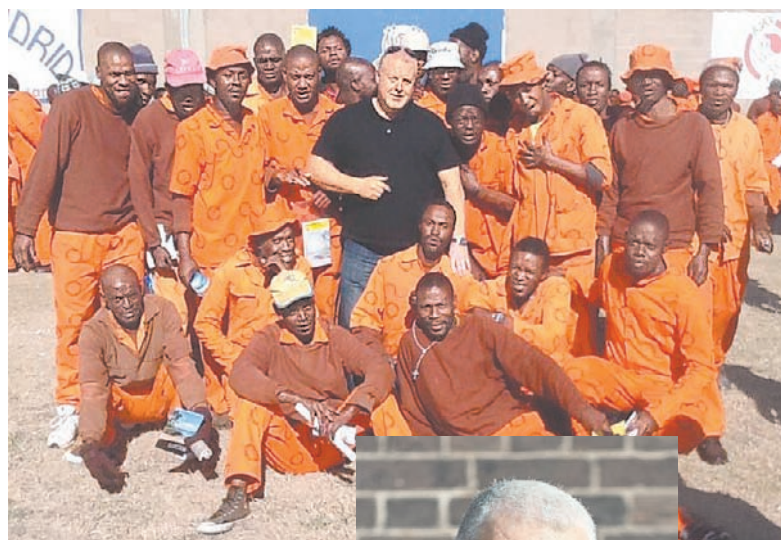
His family then lived in a council flat in a rough housing estate, where John encountered violence for the first time.

"I saw other kids my age sniffing glue, taking drugs, carrying blades and being prepared to use them... I discovered I had an ability to take a punch and an ability to fight."

In school John was always getting into trouble. Then when he graduated he became a bouncer and joined a biker gang in a search for brotherhood.

"I got married at 21 and by the time I was 22 I was divorced," John tells Premier Christianity.

Now a single dad to a young son, John joined his



LEFT: John Lawson is now a different man compared to the violent man he used to be. ABOVE: John visiting with some inmates at Johannesburg Central A Prison.



apart, John felt as though he had truly lost everything.

In prison, John was invited to a Bible study, where he was struck by how the other men there appeared so happy.

They sat back in their chairs and began to sing *Open the Eyes of My Heart Lord*.

John read the lyrics from the song sheet.

"I cried," he admits. "I hid my face behind the paper."

The next day John began to read the Bible for the first time.

Ezekiel 18:27 stopped him in his tracks: *"But if a wicked man turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save*

*his life."*

As he read further he read that God would give him a new heart and a new spirit if he repented (turned away from wrongdoing against God).

John recalls the prison chaplain sharing the good news about Jesus with him.

"He said, 'You were in court, you stood before a judge, the judge found you guilty and you went to prison. One day you're going to stand before God on Judgment Day – will you be guilty or innocent?'"

"He took me through a few of the Ten Commandments and I said, 'I'm guilty'. He said, 'Heaven or hell? It's as simple as that.' I said, 'I think I'm headed to hell.' Then he said to me, 'If a rich man came and paid your fine in court, the judge could set you free."

"When Jesus Christ went to the cross, He paid your fine. It's like He wrote a check for your life and after three days the check cleared and a legal transaction took place in heaven."

"God can legally dismiss the case against you because Jesus paid your fine, if only you're willing to put your faith and trust in Him."

John repented of his sins and put his faith in Jesus that day and since then, nothing has been the same. He has traveled to many countries, speaking in some of the toughest prisons on the planet.

"I've been into more prisons today as a free man than I ever did as a criminal," John says. "God has an amazing sense of humor!"

John says if God can forgive a violent man like him, He can forgive anybody.

"All you have to do is trust that He's there, search for Him, repent and surrender your life to Jesus Christ."

"I promise you His Word says He will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I'm living proof that it happens."

John has written a book about his life called *If a Wicked Man*.

gangster uncles in London's red light district, running peep shows, strip bars and the biggest brothel in London.

"I worked with a team of men who were ex-Special Forces. We would be sent to nightclubs where the local doormen couldn't handle the situation any more."

"We went in and restored order to nightclubs. We would be very heavy-handed and the levels of violence began to get bigger. I liked violence and I liked nothing better than to be paid for it."

Then John worked as a bodyguard for bands such as The Rolling Stones and AC/DC.

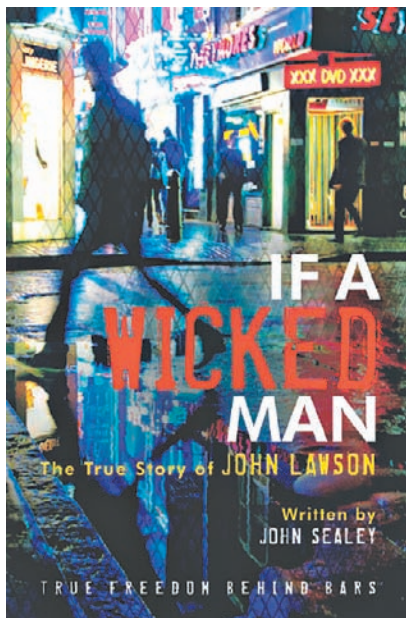
He married a second time to another single parent and had two more sons.

"I met so-called businessmen who were involved in fraud and were owed huge amounts of money."

"They didn't want to get their hands dirty so they came to idiots like me and my men. We kidnapped a lot of people, held them hostage and they would pay their money."

He felt untouchable but the police caught up with him in 2003 and sentenced John to five years in prison for extortion.

When his marriage also fell



John's book about his life, *If a Wicked Man*.

# Can you hear me now?

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

For 15 years, Victor Martel ran from God. His mother became a Christian, his father, his two brothers and five sisters followed. Victor was too busy doing drugs and hanging with the homies. Everywhere he went, Christians witnessed to him, and he tried to avoid them.

Then he received a life sentence in prison. During the first week in his cell, God spoke to his heart: Can you hear me now?

Victor had grown up in a rough neighborhood in Banning, California, where he joined a gang, drank alcohol, and consumed drugs. In his hood, he couldn't conceive of any other kind of life because it was all he saw.

At 15, he got shot in the back and cried out to God for the first time to spare his life.

Despite God answering his prayer, Victor stubbornly persisted in sin. His house got shot up as result of his involvement in the gang. At 17, he started heroin.

Two years later, Victor lost his best friend, and he cried out to God again.

Then God did something remarkable. He brought a pastor to Victor's house to tell him about the new life offered through Jesus.

In response to the gospel message, Victor accepted Jesus as his Lord and began attending church in Beaumont, a few miles away. Victor attended for three months and then "didn't follow through. I got drawn back in doing what I wanted to do."

The pastor visited regularly to encourage Victor to return to church. "Tell him I'm not here," Victor told his mother.

Instead, Victor's mother turned from her sins and gave her life to Christ. His dad also became a Christian. One by one, his brothers and sisters all came to Jesus.

However, Victor still persisted in turning his back on God.



ABOVE: Victor with his wife Paula. INSET: Victor in his younger days.



"I knew that I wasn't the same person. I had a conviction of what was right and wrong,"

Victor acknowledges. "But I ran away from God. Everywhere I went, I would see Christians, and I would try to avoid them. But God was on my tail."

As the years passed, Victor met a girl and they had a daughter, for whom he cleaned himself up.

For a couple of years, Victor stayed sober. But when his birthday approached, he wanted to celebrate with some heroin.

However, he didn't realize that coming off drugs lowered his resistance. When he shot up, he started dying. He was gasping for air. He could only see in tunnel

vision. Once again, he cried out to the Almighty to spare his life. "God, don't let me die," he prayed inside his head.

God answered and Victor finally began to breathe normally.

But he still hadn't learnt his lesson and kept using drugs following his relapse. When his girlfriend left him and took his daughter, he still didn't reform.

That's when the violent incident happened that led to his life sentence. After a guy hit him twice

with a crowbar. Victor's friends rushed to his defence and stabbed the attacker so that he nearly died, Victor says.

The man with the crowbar told the cops Victor had stabbed him.

Because of his stubborn pride, Victor didn't testify in his defense in court, nor did he finger the true perpetrators, he says. He also refused plea bargains.

As a result, he got a life sentence.

"Even though I didn't commit a crime, there were plenty of others that I did commit that I didn't get caught for," Victor acknowledges.

During his first week, God spoke to his heart: Can you hear me now?

The words reverberated through his mind and heart. They reverberated through his memory for weeks to come, and then for years.

Eventually he broke. Relenting from his stubborn resistance to God,

Victor confessed his sin and began serving the Lord. He attended chapel, read his Bible, prayed and talked to other inmates about Jesus. He kept on the straight and narrow.

For 15 years, he had been running from God. He spent 21 years in the state penitentiary. As the years wore on, he began to pray: "God, I don't want to die in here."

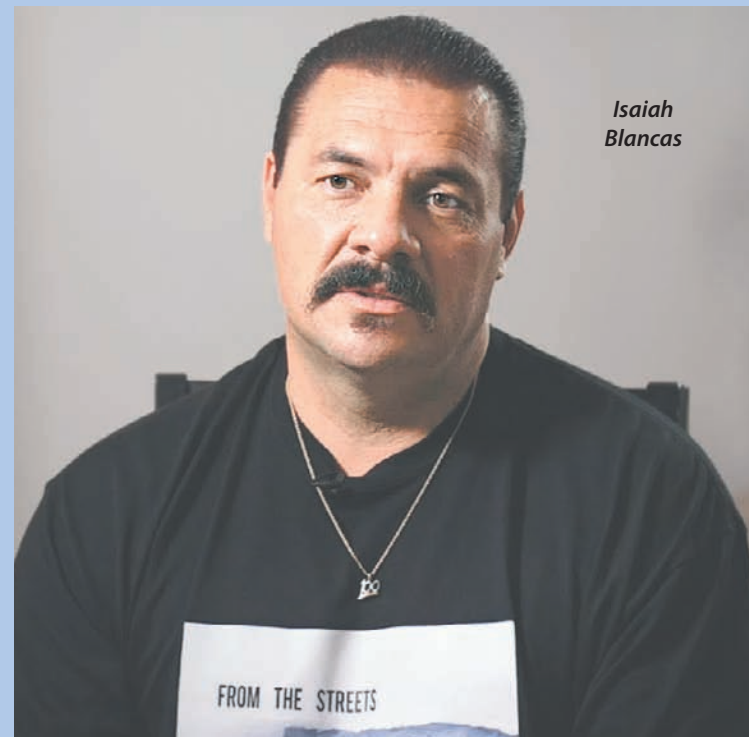
He memorized verses from the Bible to encourage himself that, despite the life sentence, he might one day be released.

*'Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you; I will hold you up with my righteous right hand.'* – Isaiah 41:10 and *'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.'* – Daniel 6:16

In 2019 at his fourth parole hearing, without any write ups or disciplinary actions, with letters of recommendation from corrections officers in hand, Victor finally got released. The commissioner told Victor: "Mr. Martel, you should have been out a long time ago."

Today, Victor, 57, is married and serving Jesus in Van Nuys, CA.

He works doing highway maintenance.



Isaiah Blancas

## "THE STABBER" FINDS A GANG WORTH DYING FOR

When Isaiah Blancas was nine years old, his father abandoned their family, leaving the young boy "broken". Only weeks later his mother kicked him out of the house and he found his own way on the streets of El Paso, Texas.

"It was terrifying," Isaiah tells CBN. "I had a lot of anger in me. I just didn't care no more and my heart turned cold to survive."

Homeless and alone, Isaiah ate out of rubbish bins and tried to avoid the notorious gangs that roamed the streets. One night they found him, beat him and dumped him at a hospital.

"That's when I made up my mind, I was gonna be one of the most violent gang members El Paso had ever seen."

At 14 Isaiah joined the same gang that had beaten him up and nearly killed him.

His life revolved around violence, crime and substance abuse but he found a type of family and acceptance within the gang.

As the years went on Isaiah became one of the most vicious members of the gang. He was feared and respected and had a death wish. He also earned himself a nickname – The Stabber.

At 19 he had served time in prison for stabbing six people from another gang.

But instead of feeling powerful, he felt hopeless.

"I had already accepted that I was gonna die in prison or die in the streets."

In prison, Isaiah's anger was on full display. He spent a year in solitary confinement for his brutal violence and inciting riots.

"I was alone again. I didn't care about myself, if I died. I didn't care about anyone."

In solitary confinement, Isaiah was only allowed outside of his cell for an hour a day as well as for optional religious services every two weeks.

Isaiah took the opportunity to get out of his cell but didn't care about what was said at the services.

"I didn't believe in God, period," he recalls. "I said, 'If there was a loving God, how could He let all this happen to me?'"

At the church service, Isaiah met a chaplain called Gina, who was an ex-gang member. She challenged him about whether his gang was

worth dying for.

"She said, 'I'm going to die too – but for God's gang.'"

He saw her again a few weeks later when an inmate overdosed in his cell.

"She was hugging this guy, crying, praying for him – it really blew my mind because I'd never seen love like that you know? Genuine love for people like us."

Isaiah couldn't stop thinking about what Gina had said to him and about who he had become.

"I was a horrible person – someone that didn't deserve grace (undeserved love of God), someone that didn't deserve love after all the wrong I had done," he admits. "I said, 'Could this God really use someone like me, that's just broken?'"

The question played on his mind and he posed it to Gina at the next service.

"She said, 'Yes, He will. He will use you for His glory. He came for people like you – for the worst of the worst.' And so at that time I opened my hands out and I said, 'If this God you're talking about loves me then here I am' and I gave my life to God that day."

Isaiah grew in his faith and, just as God had forgiven him of his wrongdoing, he forgave his parents too.

Isaiah is now married and has four children. He runs a ministry that helps those trapped in addiction and violence to find a better life through faith in Jesus Christ.

## The difference between remorse and repentance

BY GREG LAURIE

IF I WERE to get in my car and go down the freeway at 140 miles per hour, I would be remorseful if the highway patrol pulled me over. Why? Because I'd pay a penalty for my choices. I'd get a ticket and maybe even spend the night in jail. And my insurance rates would go up significantly.

But if I were to get in my car and do the same thing the next day, it would show that I was not repentant, not willing to turn away from my wrongdoing.

There's a difference between remorse and repentance. Sometimes we confuse the two. We're remorseful when we're sorry for getting caught. But we're repentant when we're sorry enough to stop doing the same thing.

A lot of people feel remorse. Maybe someone traps them in a lie or catches them stealing. Or maybe they sin in some other way, and it catches up with them eventually. Thus, they're remorseful. But do they change their behaviour?



STOCKPHOTO

If they simply plot a little more carefully the next time and hope they won't get caught, that's not repentance; that's just remorse.

The Bible says, "For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

If you can continue on a course of sin despite feeling guilty about it; that tells me you don't know God.

Maybe you've never given your life to Jesus. Maybe there has never been a moment in your life when you said, "Lord, I'm sorry for my sin, sorry enough to turn away from it." Perhaps you've been sorry because you've been found out, but are you willing to turn away from that sin and put your faith in Jesus?

Jesus is telling us, "Friend, I love you, and I'm reaching out to you." But you must reach out as well and take His hand. Have you done that yet? Today is as good a day as any to grasp the hand of salvation.

# WORDS FOR THE HEART

## STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Welcome to this Bible Study. Read slowly what I have written. If you have a Bible, look up the reference verses given, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul through them. – ALAN BAILEY

### John 21:7-25

#### INTRODUCTION

WE have reached the point where Jesus shows Himself to His disciples, making sure that they know He has truly risen from death. In our last study, we read how that some disciples had gone fishing on the Sea of Galilee, and in the early morning, after catching nothing, the Lord appeared on the shore and told them to throw a net over the right side of the boat. The result was amazing, the net being full, so full they could hardly haul it in.

So, we take up the story from there. **Ch 21: Verses 7-9** "Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say 'It is the Lord' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread."

At first, they were not sure who the person was, calling to them from the shore. But when they saw the large catch of fish, they realized it was Jesus. It could be no-one else. Peter was normally quite impulsive and here he was again, leaping into the water to help pull the net ashore. It is interesting to note that Jesus already had some fish on the fire.

**Verses 10-14** "Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who are You?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised from the dead."

Perhaps we could wonder why the disciples were hesitant about identifying Jesus when they knew Him so well. It seems that in the resurrected body, His appearance may have been a little different. He had previously shown Thomas the wounds in His hands and side, so He still wore the marks of the severe treatment He had received at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

**Verse 15** "When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love Me more than these?' 'Yes Lord,' he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'"

There was a purpose in this encounter at Galilee. You will remember that Peter denied even knowing the Lord when challenged after the arrest of Jesus. Now the Lord is giving him the opportunity to declare his love and confirm it. The meaning of the words "more than these" is uncertain. He must have meant either the fish or the other disciples because they were the only other things there. The order to feed His lambs, means to lead and instruct children.

**Verses 16, 17** "Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, You know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.' The third time He said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' He said, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Feed My sheep.'"

Peter had denied the Lord three times in front of unbelievers and now he has the chance to confirm his love and loyalty three times. Peter was to be a leader in the growth of the church which was about to be formed and it was important for him to be prepared. The words "feed my sheep" are meant to urge Peter to be a carer of souls, the many who were soon to believe in Jesus. He is re-instated to be the Lord's servant.

**Verses 18, 19** "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, 'Follow Me!'"

This is a warning to Peter that his service would be costly to him personally. It is an indication of death and the manner of it that lies ahead. The martyrdom of God's people is to the glory of God. Tradition has it that Peter was eventually crucified, some saying upside down. This is not at all certain.

**Verses 20-22** "Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who



Stock photo

had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray You?') When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow Me.'"

This other disciple is John, the author of the book we are reading. Peter is curious to know whether John will have a similar future, but the Lord is saying that it is not a matter for Peter's concern.

**Verses 23, 24** "Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; He only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?' This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."

It is now plain that John has been referring to himself. He wants to make sure that the words of Jesus are not misquoted. We know that John was the only disciple of the twelve who didn't meet an early death. He was exiled on the Isle of Patmos as an old man. Here he wrote the Book of Revelation.

**Verse 25** "Jesus did many other

things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that could be written."

These are John's final words for his book. Having spent three eventful years with Jesus he has many memories of the things that happened.

He has told us of some, but he is mindful of just so much more which he hasn't been able to report. The claim about insufficient room for all the books is what is called 'hyperbole'. It means exaggeration but it is used to emphasise a point. It occurs elsewhere in the Bible and other literature.

#### CONCLUSION

At the end of chapter 20, John tells us why he wrote the book: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

John has given us great and wonderful reasons for believing that Jesus is the Son of God and now the question remains; Has the reader put his/her faith in Him, the only Savior and Lord? We must answer the question.

C	H	E	R	U	B	I	M	F											
E	A	A	Y	E	L	P			1	2	3	6							
G	L	U	T	E	N	O	A		1	2	9	6	3	7	5	8	4		
A	P	S	E	K	O	P	E	K	6	3	4	2	5	8	9	7	1		
Z	E	M	I	V					9	6	1	7	2	5	8	4	3		
U	N	S	P	A	K	A	B	L	4	8	7	1	9	3	6	5	2		
M	I	N	E	L					2	5	3	8	6	4	7	1	9		
P	A	N	A	M	A	F	L	A	8	1	2	3	7	9	4	6	5		
O	N	G	O	I	T	R	E		3	9	5	4	8	6	1	2	7		
E	U	R	O	E	J	I			7	4	6	5	1	2	3	9	8		
A	S	U	R	V	I	V	A	L											

## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

We read in God's word: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

<b>OUR PROBLEM:</b>	<b>Separation from God</b> "Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)	<b>ADMIT</b>
<b>GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:</b>	<b>Jesus died on the cross</b> "God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)	<b>BELIEVE</b>
<b>OUR RESPONSE:</b>	<b>Trust Jesus by receiving Him</b> "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)	<b>COMMIT</b>

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life." (John 6:47). He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

#### What now?

1. Tell someone - either a fellow prisoner who is a Christian, or your Prison Chaplain.
2. Ask a friend or family member to bring you a Bible. Ask the Prison Chaplain to sign you up to a correspondence discipleship program.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find out if your prison has church services and attend them regularly.

**AS A NEXT STEP:** Please send me:  Bible  Some 'starting off' literature  Information on a helpful church

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

\* Please check and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A LIGHTHOUSE?

BY ILSE FRIIS

A LIGHTHOUSE is designed to warn the ships of dangerous rocks or shallows and show them the way they need to go. They deter ships from running aground, preventing the ship's destruction and that of their cargo, and the lives of their crew.

Now, if a lighthouse and a ship are on a collision course, who has to move?

Of course it is the ship that needs to move, otherwise it will be destroyed. The lighthouse will always be at the same spot. It is not designed to move, but to be constantly showing the way. It will always be there to protect.

As long as those rocks or shallows are there, they pose a danger; in the same way, as long as sin is present it will destroy people (i.e. always). God's Word and principles will be a lighthouse warning us of the peril we face if we do not change our course.

His lighthouse of truth shows us the way to conduct our



Stock photo

lives and to make the best decisions. It protects us from shipwreck and keeps us safe. If we follow God's guidelines and commands we will always receive God's best for our lives.

His lighthouse is there to keep us from destruction, not spoil our fun.

Proverbs 6:23 reads: Sound advice is a beacon, good teaching is a light, moral discipline is a life path.

And Proverbs 2: 6-8 says: For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.

Don't you think the safest course is to let God's Word and principles guide your life?

You can start by praying to invite Him into your life, and asking Him to empower you to live as He directs. Then read His instruction manual (the Bible) and be guided by its light.



Christian Atsu of Newcastle United (left) runs with the ball during the Premier League 2 match between Leeds United and Newcastle United at Thorp Arch Training Ground on March 15, 2021 in Leeds, England. (Photo by Serena Taylor/Newcastle United via Getty Images)

# LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY

Rising from abject poverty in Ghana, Christian Atsu played for English soccer teams in Chelsea, Everton, Bournemouth and Newcastle before being signed to Turkish club, Hatayspor in 2022.

Tragically it was there that he lost his life in the earthquake in 2023, aged only 31. He left behind his wife, Marie-Claire Rupio, and two sons and a daughter. He also left behind a legacy of strong faith in Jesus.

“My faith is the most important thing in my life,” he told *The Guardian*. “I know I’m one of the lucky people God has blessed. I’m very lucky and privileged to be in such a position. I had nothing and now I’ve got so much I have to give something back.”

Christian was a young teenager when he made the decision to follow Jesus for himself.

“I reached a level where my parents didn’t have to tell me I have to go to church, or do this or do that,” Christian said in an article for the Newcastle United website.

“I realized that I have to make the choice. Parents don’t force their children to go to church. They make sure they bring you up in the way of the Lord, and then you make the decision yourself. That’s what I did.”

Following his

death, tributes flowed in from around the world for the winger, who was once hailed as the Ghanaian Messi. His body lay in state for a week before his funeral, which included a military procession.

He was buried in his hometown, Dogobome in Ada Foah, on Ghana’s south east coast.

Christian’s professional career began with Portuguese team FC Porto when he was 17.

Two years later he joined Chelsea on a five-year contract and was immediately loaned to Dutch club Vitesse Arnhem, followed by Everton, Bournemouth and Málaga.

Christian joined Newcastle United in 2016, where he stayed until 2021. He then joined Al Raed Saudi Football Club. In September 2022, he joined Turkish professional league Süper Lig’s club Hatayspor.

He played three league games and one in the Turkish Cup.

The day before the earthquake, Christian scored the only goal at home to Kasimpaşa in the seventh minute of added time.

He represented Ghana at the 2014 FIFA World Cup and four Africa Cup of Nations tournaments.

His team was the runner-up at the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations, where he was awarded Player of the Tournament and Goal of the Tournament.

Despite Christian’s international success, however, he never forgot his roots or his family back home. “Whenever I go home, I am happy,” he told Arms Around the Child, for whom he was a global ambassador.

“You never forget the person you were before you left. I survived but I don’t forget.”

He was one of 10 siblings and was only 12 when his father died. Just before his father died, he told Christian that he should worship God and help humanity.

Growing up in poverty was not easy for Christian, however and he found it hard to accept the cards he had been dealt.

“Sometimes I would complain to God a lot: ‘Why should I suffer like this? Why should some people have it easy?’ When I was growing, I would read the Bible, trying to understand everything. ‘Why? Why? Why?’ Then I realized that I was complaining too much. God’s power has to be manifested in my life for people to see how far He has brought me.”

“The Bible says it is not by our hard work, by what we do, that makes us reach the level that we are now. For example, like me – it is not just by my hard work, though I am working hard, but it is the will of God, the grace of God, that has brought me this far.”

While in England, Christian attended church in Newcastle, stating that he was there to worship God and enjoy the freedom it gave him.

“In the house of God I’m normal,” he said. “I don’t want a celebrity life. When I feel normal I feel free.”

After Christian’s death, former West Ham and Fulham defender



Ghanaian soccer player Christian Atsu’s wife Marie-Claire Rupio (L) and children at his funeral at the State House in Accra, Ghana on March 17, 2023. (Photo by Kwame Adzaho-Amenortor/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

John Paintsil paid tribute to his friend.

“He helped a lot of people solve their problems, gave out to those in need,” he told BBC Ghana.

Despite his sports success, Gha-

na’s news outlets claimed that 95 percent of tributes about Christian were focused on his humanitarian work such as bailing out Ghanaians who had been jailed for stealing food.

**DISTRIBUTED BY:**