

**THE TESTIMONY
OF
DEREK**

I was born and raised in El Paso, Texas, and was baptised at the age of 7 in the Rio Grande river. I knew God at an early age, but couldn't walk with Him. I didn't know how. No one had ever taught me.

My family moved to Los Angeles in 1962 when I was nine years old, because my father, an alcoholic, had lost the mortgage of our home gambling. My childhood there consisted of attending elementary and Jr. High schools, where I began to grow up like any normal child, but I still did not know the Lord in a personal way. I went on to High school where I had a good education, graduating from a school that was third in the nation academically at that time. I now had "head knowledge", but still, no personal relationship with the Lord. I had to go to church every Sunday up until High school, but now I found that I could do my own thing because I felt that I was grown, and I did.

While on my own, my life got progressively worse. I would get in a cycle of landing good jobs but would lose interest. All the while, I delved in crime; from street racing, to casual use of cocaine, and selling marijuana. I was in and out of L.A. County Jail for minor things until in 1973, when I, along with two crime partners pulled three armed robberies. My crimes ran on me and I was left by myself. God saw fit to show mercy on me and I was acquitted of all three robberies in a jury trial.

After this experience I thought that I was invincible, because my ego put me in a position that would take me to the top, so to speak. Within a few years I had been married, blessed with a good wife, Patricia, and had a beautiful daughter, Sarah Rebecca, only to have my wife walk out of our relationship because of my being an alcoholic and adulteror. I had my own business then, and I was determined to never be hurt again by anyone. I hadn't yet realized that I was doing the hurting. Within a short time after this I had reached the top, as they say. I had become a Real Estate Appraiser, was attending college, and had the nice car and condominium in the Fox Hills district of Culver City, CA. It was an upscale neighborhood, and as a result, I had girlfriends everywhere. By this time, I was learning to treat women as objects and not as compassionate, caring children of God. My neighbors were Jerry Buss' kids, the single basketball players of the Los Angeles Lakers, and I was living right by them! Yes, I was really at the top. But God was going to humble me greatly. I remember coming from a Dodger game one week and passing through the skid row district of Downtown Los Angeles to get to the freeway. At a stop light on 4th and Los Angeles streets, I remember saying to myself, "Somebody ought to clean up this mess down here!!"

That humiliation that I spoke about in my life came about through my continued use and abuse of rock cocaine and alcohol. Once hooked on both, I lost everything, and I went to the curb, literally. I went downhill really fast, and ended up on the streets in the skid row district, the very district that I had passed through before, and had looked down on everyone there.

There were Christian churches that came to skid row, giving food, clothing and help, but I wanted none of that. I wanted my short dog of wine, and my crack cocaine. I was a hopeless case. Whenever my health would get bad, I knew that I could call my dad, and stay with him a while. He had been a "Player and Hustler" most of his life, but had at this particular time, turned his life over to the Lord. He was literally "walking softly with God". For me, I couldn't do such a thing. My father used to tell me when I came to his house to recover from poor health: "Son, walk softly with God". But I couldn't. As my life got worse, my crimes got worse, and I ended up in San Bernadino County Jail, headed for prison. I was at a low in my life, I had reached "rock bottom".

While at county jail, like Jonah in the belly of the big fish, I cried out to God, and he heard my cry. I was now walking with him. Little by little he began to work in my life to mold and shape me into his vessel. When I first arrived at prison, rather than letting me have an easy way to do time as a permanent worker at Chino prison, the Lord allowed me to be transferred to Pelican Bay State Prison, the end of the line for anyone in the California Prison System. While there, I learned respect and discipline. I also learned that I was a coward for the God that I loved because I couldn't walk the yard and fellowship with Christians of other races. I could do this in the church but not outside of it.

Then came Armando Ramos. "Weasel". He was a man who stood out to me as a "pillar", if you will, in the Christian community. He talked the talk and walked the walk. I don't know why, he and God knew, but

I would listen to him and he would disciple me in a way that was sound and made sense. He spoke with authority, as though he was very familiar with scripture. In fact, there were not very many scriptures that you could cite that he didn't know. What I found out was that the reason Weasel had this knowledge was because God had given him the gift of teaching, and had blessed him with wisdom and knowledge of His word. As a student of God's word, Weasel would spend 12 to 18 hours a day studying God's word. He had become a living example of how I was to live my life in Christ Jesus.

God had plans for the both of us. We both rode the bus together down from Pelican Bay Prison, to a new Prison at Calipatria, in Southern California. To make a long story short, God blessed me and Weasel with jobs as Chapel clerks. Immediately, we both went to war with God, to claim Calipatria Prison in Jesus' name. The battle was fierce, but we won. In fact, when the Protestant Chaplain was transferred, we both in a sense, began to share the awesome responsibility of facilitating the Protestant Chapel Program for the whole prison. We had a Catholic Priest, a new Chaplain who was a "fish out of water". He had never been to a prison in his life, and didn't know what a Chaplain's responsibilities were. But God blessed us all, and we rolled up our shirt sleeves and went to work. In my second year at Calipatria I found a Chaplain's Newsletter from Donovan Prison, and when I had read the second page, I said, "That's where I want to be". I sought the Lord's will in prayer, but had doubt in my heart. Weasel, brother Armando, told me all the while, "Just believe brother, have faith. Faith is believing".

Within one month and a half I was on a bus to Donovan Prison. Within one month while at Donovan I received a job as Chapel Assistant, in the very Chapel where the Newsletter that I had read, was published.

Here I stand. I am a living testimony of a broken man whom God has taken, and is molding and shaping, to use for His will and purpose. I invite you to do the same. Let God control your life. You will never be disappointed. People, places, and things in this life will disappoint you, but God never will!!!

To be continued!!!!!!

***** JESUS IS LORD *****

*I love you, brother
God has begun a good
work in you.*