

TESTIMONY FROM PRISON

My name is Michael W. and I am a born-again Christian. This has not always been so. In fact, right now I am in prison reaping the fruits of my life of rebellion against God.

I was once a very angry little man who hated everyone and everything including myself. I tried to hide from my feelings by abusing alcohol, and later in life, using drugs. My alcoholism began at the age of 15. I was an emotionally distraught teenager with no parental guidance to speak of. My family had no place for the Lord. The only time God's name was heard around our house was as a curse. I was lost and confused and I didn't know where to turn. I did what many children are doing today; I escaped through the oblivion of alcohol.

Without revealing my age, I'll tell you that I grew up during the time when John Wayne was America's greatest motion picture hero. I patterned my life after my movie hero and idol. Whenever John Wayne had a problem, he would get drunk and beat someone up. That works fine in the movies, but in real life it does not work at all. My life grew more and more violent as the years went by. I ended up killing someone in a drunken, jealous rage. That netted me 25 years to life in prison.

Although this sounds like a tragic end to a life of despair, it was really the beginning of something wonderful. While I was in County Jail waiting to be

sentenced, a Christian lady named Vicki began writing to me and witnessing to me about Christ. All she knew about me was from some dinner table gossip she had heard from the people she worked for. These people were my worldly friends, yet they inadvertently opened the door to Christ for me.

I didn't receive Vicki's witness with open arms, of course. I answered her letter and told her I didn't need Jesus in my life. She didn't give up but just kept witnessing to me and challenging me to read the Scriptures and to determine what it meant. The Lord touched my heart with the truth and I asked the Lord to come into my heart on April 5, 1988.

I spent the first part of my sentence in Old Folsom State Prison, a maximum security correctional facility in Northern California. I completed as many correspondence courses as I could get my hands on. I believe I did 32 courses. By the Lord's mercies I was sent to San Diego (R.J. Donovan State Prison) in June of 1990, just at the time when Southern California Bible College was offering its first class in the prison. I was too late to enroll in that class, but I have been enrolled in classes ever since. It has been so edifying that I have even taken some classes more than once.

That was six years ago and I am finally getting through my last class. I must admit that I am somewhat saddened at

the prospect of not attending SCBC anymore. The instructors have all been tremendous blessings in my life. You know that the men and women in the prison system are considered "throw aways" by society, and some prison staff treat us with contempt and disgust. However, the men Southern California Bible College has sent here to teach us come in with love and kindness. They bring a cool drink of water to Christ's little ones who are behind bars. I have tears in my eyes as I think of Dr. Hare, Dr. Robbins, Jeff Bloom, Jay Martinson, Carey Norman, and Bruce Leary. Each of these men have touched my heart forever. I am glad my big friends on the weight pile cannot see my tears right now.

It is a privilege to be the first graduate from Southern California Bible College from inside Donovan State Prison. As I gratefully accept my diploma, I give God the glory because it was by His grace, mercy, and strength that I was able to finish the race. The lessons learned in these, sometimes exasperating, classes will strengthen me throughout the remainder of my Christian life, even if it is in prison. Only God knows for sure, but maybe I'll be able to use some of what I have learned in these classes to help some other young men learn about our Lord and Saviour, and to become firmly grounded in the truth of His Word. Praise be to God!

(Bruce) It has been a honor and a privilege knowing and working with Mike. He is a Godly gentleman and is an example for the younger men on the yard. He is active in the prison church and as a leader in the church works closely with Pastor Oien. He also is very active in the Bible College program. He has earned an "A" in every class he has taken from us. He is working on his last class in his pursuit of the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Biblical Studies.

After he finishes his doctrinal seminar class, he will meet with some faculty members to discuss his doctrinal statement.

Upon successful completion of that meeting, Lord willing, Mike will be honored with a Graduation Ceremony to be held inside the prison just for him. That graduation ceremony should take place in the late Fall.