

TESTIMONY FROM PRISON

I (Jerry) was born back east on September, 1945. At just under 3 years of age my parents were divorced and I was temporarily placed in a foster home until the age of 9. During that time my mother was admitted to a mental hospital, due to a breakdown, where she would stay for the next 10 years. Legally I was in the custody of my father. He was in and out of marriages, during which I would go live with him for a short time. Then, as the marriage would break up, I was returned to the foster home. This went on for nearly 6 years. The people at the foster home were nice, very poor, but did not display love towards me or the other foster children. I do not recall any religious teaching with them nor with my father. We never went to church. In 1953 my dad got married for the fourth and last time. I went to live with them. I soon found out that my new step mother was a strict and sometimes mean disciplinarian who was quick to wrap a willow branch around our bottoms and legs. We were a lower class family. We never had much money or clothes; we had a decent place to live even though the toilet was outside. I learned to work hard by laboring in the gardens and fields & taking care of farm animals plus related chores. We attended a "Christian" church when I was 10-14, but Jesus was not present. Never did I hear about the need to accept Christ as my Saviour and I never saw an altar call. At home we never read the Bible, never prayed, nor ever spoke of God or religion.

As an adult I seemed to follow somewhat in my dad's footsteps by going from one marriage to another. I became a very successful salesman and was financially comfortable by the age of 30. All of my problems were involving relationships. I had never felt truly loved by anyone so I was seeking it from a spouse. By 1979 I had bounced through 3 marriages and I was in the process of dissolving the fourth one. This was in addition to several other deep involvements in between the marriages. As was standard procedure for me, I was already heavily involved with another woman. Marriage plans were in the making. Unfortunately for me, I was far more sincere and dedicated to making the relationship succeed than was my fiancée. I was 12 years her senior. For nearly a year it was a roller coaster ride of "on one week and off the next." We lived together for a few months and that too was up and down. During this time we were dabbling in cocaine and marijuana. When we broke up on one occasion, she turned me in to the police for possession of cocaine and marijuana. It was a small amount and I had no criminal history, so for \$1500, the charges were dropped to a misdemeanor. At the time of my arrest my fiancée met a police officer who was at my apartment investigating my possession. A few weeks later she contacted me to renew our relationship. Like a fool I went back to her. For about 3 months she was secretly seeing both of us. Finally, she agreed to stop seeing the other guy and marry me. I purchased an engagement ring that she

helped me pick out. I thought we would now be forever happy. A few days later I caught her with the other guy again. I was devastated. I blamed myself for a lifetime of failed relationships. I had 3 children from those relationships and I felt I had failed them too. I was probably on the verge of a breakdown. My choice of solutions to all of these failures and problems was to commit suicide. First I called my fiancée with the intention of shooting myself while on the phone with her. I wanted her to feel a degree of responsibility for my death. It was my hope this would help her not tamper with people's feelings in the future. She hung up on me. I was still determined to go through with this so I went to her apartment to shoot myself in front of her. When I arrived at the apartment, much to my surprise, the other guy was there. Assuming I was there to shoot them, the other guy jumped me. I do not remember the incident. I recall later standing over both of them with a smoking gun in my hand. They had both been shot; he died and she survived. I was charged and convicted of 1st degree murder. I accepted Christ as my Saviour in the Orange County jail. A Bible mysteriously appeared on my bed one night after I returned from a court visit. No one in the cell knew anything about the Bible. I was hungry for meaning in life. I read the Bible from cover to cover. For the first time in my life, I really understood what it was saying. My heart and eyes were opened. I attended chapel services as often as I could. Whenever an invitation was given I would raise my hand. Since I had not felt anything when I was saved, I thought I had to keep

raising my hand until God decided to stop rejecting me. The Lord put a pastor's son in my cell who understood the Bible. He explained that if I meant business when I accepted Christ the first time, then I was saved. I was elated. The thing I had hoped for so long was happening. I was loved. Jesus died in my place. The pastor's son's family began visiting. They loved me too. They gave me my first complete Bible. My life has changed: my attitudes, morals, priorities. I love the Lord and have a personal, moment by moment relationship with Him. My life is devoted to Him and I strive daily to surrender my life to Him and please Him. Since accepting Christ 16 years ago, I have been fellowshipping and studying God's Word. I have taken 38 correspondence courses, attended seminars, received 2 1/2 years of discipling from a local pastor, completed 45 units from Southern California Bible College. I get to teach occasional Bible studies and I am discipling some other brothers here in prison. I attend Sunday services and am striving to apply God's Word to my life and to grow spiritually. Four years ago the Lord blessed me with a beautiful, Spirit-filled wife. She visits me weekly and we study the Bible together. Our goal is to serve the Lord full-time whether inside the prison system or in a church on the street should I be released. We have 6 children between us. All but one has accepted Christ as Saviour. Even that one is now receptive. I will continue my Biblical education and will look forward to a life filled with the joy and pleasure of serving the Lord and our fellow man.