

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

By Daniel

I was raised in a single-parent home by my mother. I have two brothers and two sisters. When I was a child, my dad used to come home drunk all the time and beat my mom. When I was about five or six years old, my mom divorced my dad. My mom raised all five of us to be best of her ability, but things were very hard for her. She worked two jobs to try and make ends meet. She had many unresolved issues to face due to my dad's beatings; she dealt with the trauma by drinking. As the years went by, my mom drank more heavily. That's when the mental & emotional abuse started against me. I heard, "You're stupid", and "You're just like your father." These outbursts were worse than a beating.

There were five things that I desired from my mom and dad: a sense of belonging, a sense of worthiness, to be accepted by them, to experience open communication from them, and most of all, to be loved by them. Unfortunately, I did not get love from them at home, so I went looking for love in the streets.

At the age of 14 I entered the world of gangs; that was the beginning of my downhill spiral through drugs, alcohol, and self-destruction. However, I wore a mask and gave everyone the impression that everything was OK with me; inside, I was hurting and screaming for help.

From the age of 14 to 30 I was in and out of jail; every time I was arrested, I was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. I seemed to be following the bad example of my family – my dad, my mom, my grandmother, my uncle, and my sister. Sadly, my sister died from a heroin overdose. For so many years I had too much pain, anger, and unforgiveness stuffed deep in my heart. My only escape from this torture was to get drunk and stay drunk. I felt absolutely hopeless; nothing mattered anymore.

In September of 1994 I was arrested for armed robbery. As I sat on the curb handcuffed, feeling hopeless, I said to myself, "You

couldn't even stay out of prison for 40 days." Later, while in jail lying on my bunk, the words of my sister's boyfriend came back to me, "Jesus will give you rest." The courts gave me thirteen years. As I transferred from county jail to the prison reception center, little did I know that God had a Christian cellie waiting for me. I entered the cell to my cellie's, "Hi! My name is Henry, and I am a Christian." I had no idea what a Christian was, so I watched his daily routine. He was very disciplined & consistent in praying and reading the Bible. What really drew me to Christ were the character traits in this man; he was different; I wanted so much to be like him. I definitely decided, "I want to know this Christ my cellie serves." A few weeks later, in September of 1995, I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.

For so many years I had been trying to fill the void in my heart with relationships, alcohol, money, and recognition from others. My heart remained empty and in pain. Today, I can honestly say that Christ has filled my empty, lonely, wounded heart with His overflowing, unconditional love. I am a new man – a man who got his wish: God gave me a sense of belonging; God gave me worth through Jesus Christ; God accepted me just the way I was; God eagerly communicates with me; best of all, God loves me.