

PRISON TESTIMONY

I, Donald, was born on April 29, 1960 in a California city. My mother had a very hard birth with me to the point where both of our lives were in danger, but God in His divine plan protected our lives. I grew up in a dysfunctional family. On the outside things appeared normal. Dad worked hard; Mom stayed home and cared for my brother, two sisters, and me. My parents, uncles, and aunts used drugs. I remember seeing my family members meeting in the garage putting a dried leafy substance in wax paper bags. I also saw my mom counting small white pills & putting them in foil. This exposure to drugs did not seem to have an effect on me. I thought it was all very normal. At age 12 I saw films in drug awareness classes which showed the effects of drugs on people. I thought it was all fiction since I had never seen anyone in my house acting like that.

By age 13 I was smoking marijuana & drinking alcohol. My parents had separated by this time. Without parental supervision, my actions were barely noticed. My use of alcohol & stronger drugs caused a disinterest in sports. I had been involved in baseball & football since I was 8 years old. By the age of 16 my drug had increased to everyday, my girl friend was pregnant, and school was no longer important. During this time I was invited to church by my uncle who had just accepted Christ as his Saviour. I saw the change in his life, and deep inside I wanted what he had. I accepted Christ into my life; for the next few

months I felt joy & peace. I felt that if I followed God I would be blessed, but that if I did wrong, I would lose my salvation. This lack of security made my walk with God a struggle. I thought it would be better to withdraw from God rather than live a constant struggle. Things got worse as I began using heroin. The stupor helped me forget God's wooing as did the time I spent earning money to get my next fix.

Twenty years of drugs brought much pain and a lot of problems with the law and eventually incarceration. I knew God was my only way out of this life style. My attempts to draw close to God only ended in failure. Last year I was arrested for a simple shoplifting incident. I did not think I would do much time for such a small crime. To my surprise I was facing 25 to life under the new "three strikes" law. Bitterness, anger and resentment for the system harbored in my heart and mind. I was ultimately sentenced to 80% of a 7-year sentence. I was still bitter since I would be serving more time for this crime than I did for 4 counts of armed robbery.

Oh, but God, in His love for me, would put Christian men in my path. I would avoid Christians because they would remind me of Christ. Now, here I was in prison and God put a Christian man in the cell next door. He was faithful to remind me of God's love. I transferred from that prison & from that Christian man just to be greeted by more Christian

men when I arrived at the new prison. I finally ran across a man here at the prison who I knew existed. He was from the same area where I grew up. Sometimes the police would arrest me instead of him because our names were the same. Obviously, this name thing brought us together with a common interest. To my surprise, this guy was a Christian. Everywhere I turned God would stick a Christian.

I was invited to a chapel service; when I walked in I felt at home. They sang "Just As I Am." I found tears on my face. Even after all my failed attempts to draw near to God & then to stay away from His love, He still wanted me and fellowship with me. How can God still love me after all the rejection I showed Him? I went back to my cell and gave my life back to God.

A few days later, a chapel service was my turning point. The teachers were leading a Bible study and were talking about forgiveness. I don't remember all the details but the man turned to me and kept asking me who it was that I had to forgive. I tried to think who it might be. Could it be the bounty hunters who turned me in when I jumped bail. I prayed and asked God to help me forgive them.

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. I needed to forgive me; I needed to forgive myself for failing God, my family, and all my Christian brothers.

That's not all. I am learning the true sonship of Christ and His love. He doesn't reject me whenever I fail. I now have the security I once lacked; I am

sealed by God's Holy Spirit; my salvation is secure. Praise God!

Now I have a Christian cellie, and would you believe - I look for Christians rather than hide from them.