

Drug Addict-Convicted Felon Testimony

An Answer... (1Peter3: 15) (CEV) *Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope*

I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ who has been delivered from drug addiction and struggles with self-worth, codependency, fear, guilt, shame, acceptance, and many other areas while dealing with the aftermath of the insane life I chose to live.

I was born 1974 to two loving parents. The next sixteen years of my life were rather uneventful. I was raised in the church due to the determination of my mother and my aunt. One night, I expressed an interest in spiritual things after going home from a bible study my parents had attended. After talking with my parents, I accepted Jesus as my savior. I was in the second or third grade. The only other significant event happened the next summer.

Every summer during grade school, I would spend a week back to back with both of my mother's sisters. This would allow my mom to go to the seminars and conventions she needed to attend while my dad continued working. During one of these visits, I was sexually abused by an older cousin. The worst thing about this experience was that I reached out for help—unsuccessfully. Around the middle of the week, while talking to one of my parents, I begged, pleaded, and cried desperately to come home. I was asked if something was wrong and said yes. However, due to the abuser's skillful and manipulative use of guilt, shame, and extreme fear, I was unable to come out and define the problem. I was told that I was homesick and that I should "stick in there" and "tough it out" because I would be home the next weekend. That's exactly what I did. I knew that I was on my own. Fortunately, nothing like this ever happened to me again, and I was able to avoid dealing with it or even mentioning it to another human being for many years. I am still not fully aware of all the affects this has had in my life. I do know that it affected me socially and sexually for many years.

In 1988, my parents divorced. Like any child caught up in a separation, I knew that this was my fault. My mom and I moved from Jenks to Glenpool where I spent my tenth grade year and hated it. This is when I began to get into trouble out of boredom and a lack of good friends. Even though he just lived in Tulsa, I really missed my dad. That next summer, I turned sixteen, got a car, and moved in with my dad. The best part was that I would be able to go back to Jenks for my junior year of school.

Around Thanksgiving of 1990, my dad was offered a job in Las Vegas—it was too good to be true. This is the landmark by which I identify the beginning of the downward spiral in my life. Against the protests of my mom, I decided that I was moving out there too. It would be an adventure; guys were supposed to stick together; and besides, my dad needed me. These were the things I thought and used to justify my decision. The only problem was that we didn't have the money to move out there. At one point, we even considered robbing some place here in Tulsa to fund the move. I still don't remember where that brilliant idea came from. Thankfully, we were able to come up with enough money to get out there without breaking any laws.

Upon arriving in Las Vegas, we found out that the job that was offered to my dad no longer existed. Why we didn't turn around and come back home immediately is something I may never know. We spent the remainder of our money living in Las Vegas for a week or so while my dad looked for work. He even tried temp and day labor agencies with no success. We spent a few more nights in the car and looked for work, spending money only on gas and food. That money too ran out. One night, my dad pulled up next to someone walking between the hotel buildings of a large casino and robbed them. I was shocked but thankful to have money and a room to stay in that night.

The next day my dad got extremely sick. After checking out of the hotel the next day, I loaded my dad into the car and drove straight through back to Tulsa. Even though I was glad to be home, we decided not to tell anyone for a while. We called and checked in with everyone, telling them we were still living happily in Las Vegas—we never had been. During this time, we robbed our first house. My dad dropped us off, and my friend and I went in the back window. Shortly after this escapade, we announced that we were home. We robbed one more house—just my dad and I—for which he was eventually arrested and charged. He was released the next day on New Day. He would later be sentenced to three years, but not until after I too was arrested and charged with other crimes.

My crimes stepped up to the next level. I had decided that burglaries were too risky and not profitable enough. Using my dad's .25 caliber pistol and a Glock 9mm we bought off the street for fifty dollars, a friend and I began a string of armed robberies. During this time, my dad, my friend, and I lived in different hotels around town. On January 4, 1991, this all came to a screeching halt. I was a sixteen-year-old gifted and talented advanced placement student on Christmas Break from Jenks High School when I was arrested. I had never been arrested before. My first offense went down in the books as Robbery w/ a Firearm.

Based upon my age and the seriousness of my charges, I was certified and

adjudicated as an adult in the state of Oklahoma. I was held on a \$120,000 bond and sentenced to fifteen years in the custody of the Department of Corrections. I remember being sixteen and thinking that was nearly a life sentence. It would be safe to say that I "grew up" in prison

I learned a great number of things in prison. I received a GED three days after my seventeenth birthday and went on to get my High School Diploma, an Associates Degree w/ Honors, and a VoTech certification in business and computer technology. I also worked in the education department's office and tutored both GED and college students as my work assignment.

Most of what I got out of prison, however, was learned outside of the education building. I learned about loyalty, character, integrity, and leadership as could be learned only on a prison yard. I also learned two very important things: 1. Drugs are an enjoyable way of coping with stress and other problems. 2. Drugs are always in demand and can be an excellent source of income and power.

During my incarceration, I turned my back on God completely. I got very deep into studying the occult in my free time and poured quite a bit of money into building a personal occult library. I also poured quite a bit of time and energy into persecuting and tormenting those, I judged to have adopted the ever-popular "jailhouse Christianity."

Thankfully, this changed in the fall of 1994. One of my fellow tutors was a man named Dal. Dal was a sincere Christian with whom I could find no complaint. He lived an authentic and consistent witness. I began working out as well as going to church services and bible studies with Dal. In October, I rededicated my life to the Lord and was delivered from the occult.

I was released from prison May 2, 1995 on parole. Six days later, I was reunited with my first love. The next three months were great. I was out of prison, had a good job, and was with the girl of my dreams. Then it all fell apart. I had allowed sexual sin into my life, and had to face the consequences that August. In one smoothly spoken sentence, my girlfriend told me she was pregnant and having an abortion. Shortly afterwards, she left me for the guy she had been dating while I was in prison. This, along with losing my job, devastated me.

Shortly thereafter, I was introduced to my new best friend, lover, and god. While pulling an extremely long shift at work, a buddy of mine shared some of his dope with me. He described the stuff as harmless speed that would help me make it through the night. That it did—and many endless days and weeks to come. The next seven years of my life were consumed with whatever it took to make sure I had dope. There were practically no limits to where I'd go or what I'd do.

During this time, I went through multiple cars, jobs, and relationships—de-

stroying or discarding them thoughtlessly. I slept in vacant houses, cars, and even under a bridge. These were all mile markers on my highway to a living hell on earth.

I was blessed however in the winter of '97-'98. While visiting the TCC Students for Christ meeting, I met a wonderful young lady. In the infancy of our relationship, I strung together just over three months clean. We began dating on April 19, 1998. I relapsed a short time later. I lived a double life and kept things hidden from her unsuspecting eyes rather well—until September. One Sunday in early September, I went to church with her. They took communion that morning, but I was unable to. I prayed to God saying: "I am so far from right with you that I don't know how to get back. You will have to do something to help me." The next day I was arrested in a Broken Arrow hotel room. I made bail and stayed out fighting my case for over a year—spiraling farther and farther down into my addiction. I was sentenced to five years in prison in November of 1999. I served a year and a half in prison this time during which I went through an intensive drug and alcohol treatment program. I was released on parole in June of 2001 with all of the tools and answers I needed to live a successful life without drugs—or so I thought. Who was I kidding—I had been doing drugs while in prison going through treatment.

I got out and got a job immediately. Less than two months later, I once again had a needle in my arm. This time proved to me that the disease of addiction is progressive. I immediately returned to the depths of my sickness. Nothing mattered but chemicals and dope. During another half-hearted attempt at getting clean, I heard about an awesome Christ-centered program called Celebrate Recovery. I came off and on for a few months—when I was coherent enough—but never really made any connections because I wasn't opening up and trying to. My life and my addiction continued to spiral downwards. On January 7, 2003, I discharged my last prison sentence making me "free and clear." While I should have been happy and excited, I was miserable. I had everything the drug addict in me had wanted, but my life was still completely empty and utterly worthless. I was on the verge of losing everything once again, and I really didn't care. I had hit my bottom. I have never been suicidal in my life, but at this point, I would not have fought off the guy who came to kill me.

I reviewed all of the history up to this point to demonstrate the awesome work of grace, mercy, and restoration God has done in my life through His Son Jesus Christ and the ministries of Celebrate Recovery. I left out most of the details and war stories because I wish this last part of my testimony to be the focus.

One of the most amazing things about the last five and a half years is that my

girlfriend stuck with me through all of the chaos and crap. I never understood why or how until just recently, but that is another story you should ask her about. I'm sure she would share if asked during coffee shop. She too was at the end of her rope with me. She had almost given up many times. Finally, she saw the light at the end of her tunnel.

I came back to CR on the seventh of February with a quiet but intense sense of desperation in my heart. Sitting through the first set of worship, I cried out to God with all that I had. I told Him I was through, that I couldn't fight any longer, and that if He didn't reveal Himself to me in an intimate and personal way that night I was going to go back out and do what I knew to do and be who I knew to be until I died, someone killed me, or I ended up back in prison—probably for the rest of my life.

It happened. About the middle of the second worship set, I felt an awesome sense of peace and love overcome and fill me. I sat down in my seat and sobbed. I committed to do whatever it was that God wanted of me—whatever it took to live a whole, fulfilling, and abundant life. I had one small slip two weeks later but have been “doin’ the deal” ever since. I have been delivered from my addiction for a while now. During which I have completed a twelve-step study class in CR and began a new class as a facilitator. The step study classes are one of the most awesome tools of healing and restoration I have ever seen or heard of. I would encourage each and every one of you to experience one—and another, and another, and another, and another, and another...

I will not tell you that this has been the easiest time of my life—that was probably the six years I spent in prison. I can recount several difficult times since my new life began. But, I have made it. I am here today and my life is worth living. *Make sure you catch that. This new life may not be easy, but it is most definitely worth it.* Now that I have tasted this life, I will not live any other way. The Lord has blessed me in more ways than I could have ever imagined.

I have new, improved relationships with my family members and my girl friend, who is now my bride. I have a new career and a job at which I have more tenure than I've had anywhere in the last eight years. I've been blessed to be involved in the ministries of my church and Celebrate Recovery. *I've even been so blessed as to know I played a part—by the words and deeds of my witness—in the salvation of others. I have also been privileged enough to lead someone to know my Lord and Savior as their own, and I can tell you from experience that there is no greater, longer lasting, guilt and shame free high on this earth.*

I would like to stress and emphasize this one final point. I give all glory,

honor, and praise to God for the indescribable gift He has given me through Jesus Christ. However, I could not have made this journey on my own. I must thank those who have gone along side me: My love that has become my wife, my family, and my church family of course. I thank God all the more however for my new family: the people I have met, known, and truly loved through the Celebrate Recovery ministries—especially the men. I have come to trust, love, and even depend on many of you.

This is something I never dreamed would be possible. I have often said in group: “If you told me in 2002 that I would be living life and enjoying it, I would have called you crazy; if you went on to tell me I would be sharing in the lives of others and helping them to also learn about and live more abundant lives, I probably would have hit you in the mouth.” But, here I am; and here we go: into tomorrow, into the world, and into eternity... together.