

A FOUND LIFE



I would like to start my testimony as a story of a kid, a kid who had no future because he thought he had no life. He was quite a kid, didn't make too much noise because of his shyness. Growing into his teens, he tried to be bolder. He tried to be someone he wasn't. You see, early in his life his "so-called friends" and classmates made it clear to him that he was poor and worthless. So when he got into his teens he wanted more than ever to be accepted. He got jobs so that he would have money, picked up habits like smoking cigarettes, taking drugs, drinking alcohol and fighting because he thought people would accept him.

It appeared that it worked. But it didn't fill the void that was in his heart. For a kid whose parents divorced when he was eight and didn't feel close to anyone, not even family, he only felt loneliness. Where would he turn to fill this void? He thought girls would do it. So he accepted any girl that would give him the time of day. Then he found that one girl whom he knew he loved with his whole heart. Even though she played with his (emotions) heart, he still loved her. Her influence encouraged him to turn his life around, life had meaning. Even though he was only fifteen, he knew she was the one and he was willing to do anything to make their future a good one.

After being kicked out of school for bad grades and lack of attendance, he was sent to another school to get his G.E.D. That's where everything would take a familiar turn. The drugs and alcohol were heavy in his life and the love of his girl wasn't filling the void. He didn't think he could love her enough. He made a plan to keep his part-time job and complete the G.E.D. course and then when he had his G.E.D., he would find a full-time job. He hoped to also keep his part-time job as well and save for an apartment or house for his girlfriend, her daughter, and him.

But he got involved with some people that helped him throw all that he had and all that he had planned for away. They influenced him to commit murder for money...this is where that life ended.

Hi - My Name is Anthony and This is My Story. I wish I could stand before you this day and give my testimony, but I can't. I'm serving sixty (60) years in prison for committing murder. I was arrested at the age of 16 and while sitting in the county jail, I tried to make a deal with God. I begged and pleaded to God that if He would get me out of this, I would never do anything wrong again. I promised that I would never take another drink or drug. I started reading the Bible and it kept showing those who committed murder deserved death. I figured God is the Creator – He could do anything. As you know, God didn't take my deal and I'm doing 60 years. Well, I was mad, but I knew I couldn't be free. The loneliness sat in more than ever. Everything I loved was taken from me, my family, their love, and the love of my girlfriend and her daughter. They all wrote and visited, but I knew I couldn't let my girlfriend raise her daughter with me in jail. I told her that if she wanted to move on, to do it, but I would always love her. She left; that was another blow. Just under three years after being arrested, my Dad died of lung cancer. My father was my rock, and losing him caused me to lose all faith in God. My father kept me strong and now he was gone. I cried all I could cry and didn't care who saw me. But if you cry in prison, they think you're a punk. I began to self-medicate the void that was in my life. You see, my dad was the one that kept everything together. He always made sure everyone came



to visit me. But after his passing, I didn't see anyone for six months, nor did I hear from them. I thought that my family was gone now also. However, I did hear from them again, but it wasn't the same. I couldn't feel the connection. It was like they were writing because they felt an obligation to do so. More and more, I was beginning to feel less and less a part of the family. So they began to write and visit less and less, and I thought I was losing them.



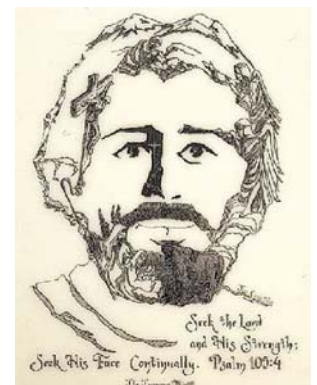
I began to think that I was a disgrace to them for what I had done and where I was. But no matter how much I wrote or they wrote or visited, I felt I was losing them because I wasn't in their lives. The harder I tried to be a part of their lives, the more it reminded me of where I was. I felt so alone that even in a crowd of people, I was the only one standing there. I felt that drinking hooch and smoking pot wasn't enough, so I started doing heroine. He was an expensive friend! Everything seemed hopeless to the point that some of my family also thought I would never come home.

Even my appeal in court seemed hopeless and it felt like I was carrying a hundred-thousand pounds on my shoulders every day.

One Sunday, I was walking back from chow talking to a guy along the way. As the officer locked us in our cells, the guy asked me if I would like to go to church with him. I figured why not, I could spend some more time out of my cell and talk with this guy some more, so I went. When we got to the service and it began, the guy I had been talking to said, "We should show respect for the service and be quite." I thought that we come to talk, but okay.

The preacher began and I listened. He wasn't looking at me, but it was like he was talking directly to me! He was asking if I had been feeling alone and that nothing ever seemed to go right no matter how hard I tried to make it. **YES!** Everything that I had felt for most of my life could all go away. That's when I felt the push.

The preacher told me that he knew someone who loves me no matter what...someone that would be there for me when I needed help...someone who wouldn't let me go thought more than I could handle. He said if I would accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord, He would fix everything. I was skeptical, but something told me that it was safe. He told me all I had to do was believe, have faith, and confess my sins, and repent. The preacher gave a couple of Scriptures. The first was Matthew 11:28-30, which says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." That was the way I felt – labored.

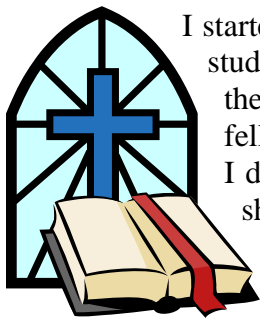


The second Scripture was I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What got me was it said **HE** is faithful and **HE** is just to forgive. I always thought that I had to do everything. I found that God loved me so much which made it easy for me to say I'm sorry for the things that I had done and to accept the forgiveness that God offered to me freely.

Later that night, I lay in my bunk and thought about what the preacher had said. As the tears welled up in my eyes, I looked and saw my cellmate was sleeping and I asked Jesus to come and save me. All the pain, the anger, the hurt, and the stuff I had been carrying were lifted off of me and a great sense of peace came over me. I asked forgiveness for the sins that I had committed and cried myself to sleep.



I talked with a guy I worked with the next day that I knew followed Jesus. His name was Walter; I asked him if he would talk with me about Jesus and being a Christian. He said he would, but he also said he wouldn't push me. He told me to let God lead me. He helped me to start reading my Bible every day and also study. One of the greatest things he told me was to not take Scripture out of context, but always read before and after each passage to see what is really meant and being said. I thank God every day for putting him and brothers like him in my life.



I started reading my Bible everyday and going to church services when they were held. I studied and read everything I could to help me understand God's Holy Word. Through the help and guidance from the Holy Spirit and daily reading, studying and fellowshiping, God has shown me that my life has purpose. It has also shown me that I don't have to feel alone anymore, and by serving Him, my life is fulfilled. He also showed me that I was close to my dad, but also that He (God) is my Father and He is my Rock – and when I am weakest, He is strong, which will help me to be strong. Most importantly, He is my family and all who follow Him are my family.

On June 23, 2006, I was baptized and it made me feel as good as I did when I first accepted Christ. I learned after going through classes on what baptism meant that not everyone can profess Jesus and be baptized in His name. It is not an easy life. We are to love our enemies as Jesus loves us and we are in a constant battle against the devil and his demons. Also, it is our sacrifice to give our life to follow and serve God. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." That is how to live life, because without faith in God, life is a lie.

So, the kid who thought he had no life – found it! He found that it had been given to him by the One who created it...that he had it all along; he just needed to ask for it. We never know what it may take to open our eyes. I know that I was born in sin as a son of Adam and was a worthless sinner all my days in the flesh, but faith in Jesus and the sacrifice He made on the cross for you and me has saved me. So I thank you for listening to my testimony and accepting me for the changed man I am in Christ Jesus' mighty name. May God bless and strengthen your faith.

Your Brother in Christ, Anthony

