

IN HIS OWN WORDS

I SERVE A NEW MASTER NOW!

The trial dragged on for months, and the jury was out for weeks. My hopes rose during the several days they were hung, only to fall when the last holdout voted to convict. Scenes of my life, especially the crimes, reeled through my mind as the judge pronounced the sentence: "LIFE IN PRISON".

My Way

By age nineteen I had little reason to believe things at home would change. My father's drunken outbursts were always verbally degrading and sometimes physically violent, and my mother's attempts to protect my sister and me were largely ineffective. I retreated from them feeling rejected, worthless and angry. Behind a smiling façade, I pacified myself with over-eating and sexual fantasy. At last, I was putting distance between me and those I considered the cause of my troubles. From Tennessee I headed west.

In Southern California, the welding and metal-work my father had taught me led to good jobs, nice things, and drugs. I believed possessions would satisfy me. However, the more things I acquired, the emptier and more frustrated I felt, which added to my desire for drugs. **"For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"** – Matt. 16:26.

During my first L.S.D. experience I encountered a compelling spiritual presence, who camouflaged my fears with counterfeit euphoria. I was allured by feelings of self-exaltation, enchanted by prospects of personal power and finally seduced by an "angel of light". **"...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."** – 2 Cor. 11:14 As ecstasy dulled my despair, Optimistically, I accepted psychedelic drugs as the keys to happiness. These experiences also whetted my appetite for the bizarre, and subtly sowed seeds of destruction, which lay dormant for years.

Those seeds came to life in a crowded Los Angeles jail cell. A false charge against me seemed reason enough to commit myself to rebellion. This decision was exploited by a spirit-being like that of my first L.S.D. experience, who encouraged me to reject the system which had falsely accused and abused me.

Soon after my release, I met Charles Manson and The Family. His engaging style, plus the offer of sex and drugs, made his invitation to join the Family easy to accept. The Family gave me a sense of belonging, which I substituted for the love and respect I craved. **"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."** Prov. 16:25 Spring's end 1968, the Family moved to an old movie ranch, and I returned to Tennessee.

My father, I later learned, had become a Christian, which explained his efforts to befriend me. But, before I could understand the change in him, he died of a stroke. Still resentful, I refused to attend his funeral. I did, however, attend the settling of his estate, took my share and again ran from the reminders of my past.

I turned twenty-six that fall aboard a Portuguese freighter. Hashish, Hess's *Siddartha* and Joplin's *Ball and Chain* did a lot to fill the time until the Açores anchored off the Biscay Bay in the Spanish Basque port of Bilbao.

Spain and then Portugal led me to North Africa. But even Tangier's abundant drugs were unable to satisfy me; I drifted to Gibraltar and then to England.

In London an invitation to a lecture introduced me to Scientology. I was attracted by their hospitality, and began to consider their New Age philosophy. These ideas lost their attraction; soon, I was back on familiar ground. Manson and one of the girls met me at Los Angeles International.

"Get out; this is trouble!", my gut warned me when I first saw them. I ignored the warning, and returned to the old movie ranch, the point of my previous departure. **"Suddenly, he follows her, as an ox goes to slaughter ...he does not know it will cost him his life."** Prov. 7:22-23. During my absence, Manson's message of sex and drugs turned to racism and violence.

A few weeks later, I drove three others to the home of Gary Hinman. He was a former family acquaintance they intended to rob. They would not believe Gary's plea that he had no money, and the robbery turned into a murder. When I heard of Gary's death, my gut warned, "Get Out!"; again I ignored it. I was not present at the time of the murder, however, having driven the car and later being in the house, I was implicated. Later, I was present at the murder of Donald Shea. To insure my involvement, Manson insisted I make a cut on Donald's dead body. I was afraid to refuse, and so I made a shallow three inch cut on his shoulder. Soon I was indicted for conspiracy to commit murder and became a fugitive.

Being a fugitive from man was easier than being a fugitive from God. Because of my relatives' prayers, I saw the hopelessness of my situation; after months on the run, I accepted prison as inevitable and surrendered to the authorities on a rainy day in December, 1970. **"Man's steps are ordained by the Lord, How then can man understand his way?"** –Prov. 20:24.

The Truth

Fall of 1974, my second year in Folsom Prison, God began to deal with me. One afternoon, while awaiting a drug delivery, a thought invaded my mind, "You will never get high again." I was amused, and then stunned with unbelief when the drugs arrived and I actually refused my share. It was powerful to realize my bondage to drugs was broken.

Later, at a water fountain, God spoke to me, "Look at the yard, what do you see?" I saw everyone cloaked with death, and said, "I don't like this." He explained, "This is the result of your choices." I suddenly understood that what I had seen on the others was my own death. "I need help." I admitted. That simple statement brought a sense of peace.

Afterwards, I began to read what I thought was science fiction, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Realizing it was not science fiction, I was about to throw it away, when the Voice said, "You said you needed help." "So what", I scoffed. He replied, "This claims to be help, read it and if it does not help, then throw it away." Doubtfully, I continued. I wanted to deny the truth of the fulfilled prophecies the writer presented, and God's requirement that surrender to the Lord Jesus was the only way to salvation. **"...there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."** Acts 4:12 Finally, I conceded God's way might be better than my own, which had definitely wrecked my life.

Later, laying in bed, I muttered, "This God stuff is crazy. I'm probably just talking to the walls." He reminded me, "You've done far worse than talk to the walls." I knew then that

resistance was futile. Even so, in a last ditch effort to justify myself, I tried to make God respond angrily to me like my father had, so my "surrender" was surly and disrespectful. "Okay, God," I said, as if giving Him His big break. "You say you love me; I don't love you. You say you want to help me; I don't believe you. But if you are willing and able, then do anything you can." Surprisingly, I awoke the next morning having had the best night of sleep that I could remember. **"When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet."** Prov. 3:24.

Over the next few days I was amazed by His love as my entire outlook began to change. I had been born again just like Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."** John 3:3 God accepted me like I was, but He loved me too much to leave me that way. Big changes were coming. **"...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, the old things passed away; behold new things have come."** 2 Cor. 5:27.

His Life

Years on the psychedelic roller coaster had destroyed my peace of mind. God began my healing by giving me an attitude adjustment, a spiritual heart transplant. **"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."** Ezk. 36:26 Then he began to focus on the particular parts of my life.

My faith and respect for God increased when He instantly delivered me from tobacco. His act helped me see the difference between His strength and my weakness, between His righteousness and my crookedness. Right then I admitted deserving death for my sin; He let me see that only Christ's sacrifice could satisfy His judgment. I said, "Lord if you will have me, then I am yours." God continued to change me.

Next came the racist attitude I'd adopted. I saw a black man named "Bad News" just after he had been stabbed to death. I felt concern and sadness for him and his family, and kept trying to deny my feelings and stop my tears. His body and the pool of blood reminded me of the enormity of my own crimes. This was the first time I felt the sorrow and pain of those I'd hurt. I also felt remorse and shame for my crimes and regretted ever going along with Manson's lies and manipulation **"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you; therefore I react, and I repent in dust and ashes."** Job 42:5. My former loyalty turned to disgust. I was glad Manson was in prison, and agreed that I belonged in prison too.

The Lord directed me to study His Word, and I began to consume the Bible and anything related to it. Attending church came next. Soon I was the chaplain's clerk, and started teaching the Bible and assisting in worship services. The calling to music was confirmed to me when the Lord impressed a prayer group to give me a Martin guitar. The D-35 was dedicated and inscribed, "To the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah, March 1, 1977."

God used those six years in Folsom to anchor me in His foundation, and to teach me that His love is greater than all my sin, fear and doubt.

In 1980, I was transferred to the California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo, where I became involved in chapel and have continued to serve the Lord. Four years later, He sent the woman who would become my wife. The following year we were married. She is a wonderful, Spirit filled woman, the crown of my life, and the most loving and honest person I have ever known.

Our marriage carried a high personal price for my wife. Though supported by a brother and sister, the rest of her family rejected me and our marriage. But, when she had a serious bout with melanoma, her mother came to investigate our situation. During that visit she began to appreciate what my wife valued in me. Our shared love for her daughter became the basis for our growing relationship, which really blossomed when she surrendered to Christ on the occasion of my daughter's dedication.

Yes, a daughter! My wife and I participated in a program which provided two-day private visits for inmates and their families. We wanted to delay having children while I was in prison, but the Lord instructed us to let nature take its course. Our daughter arrived healthy and beautiful, and a great blessing to us. Now unlike both the families in which we were raised, our family is centered in God's love, which helps us be the parents our daughter needs. Meanwhile, loving my own child, I am learning that God loves me simply because I am His child.

Over the years, God has used my wife and daughter to help me mature spiritually, experience emotional openness and reinstate my social graces. Now, by His love and grace, my life is restored; and I am part of a family in which He is Lord.

At first, I tried to solve my problems with self-indulgence, drugs and blaming others, which felt right, but led to frustration and destruction. Then Christ gave me His simple truth: Only by living on His terms could I have a meaningful life on earth and in heaven. He gives me hope and help in every situation. His solutions are worthy of my trust, although not necessarily according to my directions or wishes. He remains faithful, I remain His.

August, 2000
Bruce Davis #2172 B41079
California Men's Colony
Box 8101
San Luis Obispo, CA 93409

Originally printed in Jesus People Newsletter, Vol. 28, issue 3

It was not the possible date of Christ's return that helped convert Bruce, but the reality of a certain judgment everyone will face some day and the fact that God saves sinners by grace through faith.
