

Prison Epistles

There's Got to be a Better Way!

Several years ago I heard a Hip-Hop song that went something like this..."Twenty inch blades on the Impalla Shot Calla, swishers rolled tight...cruising down the highway doing things the fly way, my way, there's got to be a better way, a better way."

Those lyrics hit home with me because I could see my lifestyle in them and, I too, always knew there was a better way than how I was living.

Let me share some of my story with you. At the age of 12 years old I began using and selling heroin. As my addiction progressed and the street life became my life, I began committing thefts and robberies. Guns and violence were an everyday thing. As a result I spent the next 40 years in and out of prisons all across the United States, from Texas to Leavenworth, Kansas to Lompoc, California to Lewisburg, Pennsylvania to Terre Haute, Indiana. The majority of those years were spent in solitary confinement due to my involvement with gangs as a member and a leader.

The closest one with whom you could compare my past character to would have been the one Jesus came

across in Gaderene, a man with so many demons tormenting him he was living in the tombs (a grave yard) and he called himself "Legion" (Mark 5:1-20).

After many tears of misery and being tired of getting hurt and hurting others, especially the ones I loved and cared about, I listened to the knock at the door of my heart and opened it to find "a better way" standing there.

It wasn't drugs or money or people. It was Someone whose name is Jesus! And he said, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

(Matthew 16:26) "Today is the day of salvation, harden not your heart." Brothers and sisters, there is more to life than what we know in this world.

There is an eternity with or without God. And if you are tired of living a merry-go-round of torment and are seeking rest, today can be your day of salvation if you believe in your heart that Jesus is the Christ who was crucified for all of our sins. Call out to Him, asking for forgiveness of your sins, repenting (turning away from the life of unrighteousness, letting Him be the Lord of your life. And He will show you "a better way"!

R.L. Huntsville, TX



I JUST WANTED TO HAVE A LITTLE FUN!

I am 28 years old and have made a mess of my life! As I sit here writing this I am in a 9 foot by 12 foot box made of concrete and steel. There are no windows to see night or day. There is a built in shower so that I cannot even leave to wash. Three meals per day are rolled through a slot in my door. I have no day room time, no phone calls home and any time I leave this man made box I am handcuffed behind my back and escorted by officers and that is only for a cell shakedown or a visit from my family or loved ones whom I've only come to appreciate in the last year and a half. This cage is known as AdSeg home of the "tough guys and hard heads." For so long I wanted to do everything MY WAY and that's what got me where I am now.

My father was saved when I was pretty young. He started having Christian fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ in my hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. He met and married a lady I call "Mom" because she is the mother I never had. I was about 4 or 5 at the time and was thus raised in a Christian home with my brother and three sisters. We went to Christian

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camp several times each year. We had Christian fellowship every Sunday morning, Wednesday evenings and Friday nights. Very rarely did we miss one of these get-togethers. I was saved at a young age during a summer break before my sixth grade. As you are reading this you are probably asking, "Then how did you end up like you are now?" Well, let me tell you.



Growing up I lived with my parents but when the woman who gave me birth either had the time or was sober and out of prison, I would go visit her. With each trip I would get a little taste here and a little taste there of the things from which a Christian home shelters their children. It was two

very different environments and I got to see and do a lot of stuff I couldn't or wasn't allowed to do around my dad's home.

I started a new school in the 8th grade and began to resent the sheltered life at home and began getting deeper and deeper into the things of the world. I got involved immorally with a girl at the age of 14 and was sneaking out of the house to be with her. It got to the point where I knew I would get caught but I no longer cared. I would take my parent's punishment and immediately make plans to sneak out of the house again for my next "trip."

I was always looking over my shoulder seeing what everyone else in the world was doing. I felt, "Oh man, they get to do this...they get to do

that...look how much fun I'm missing out on." My dad and other Christian men tried to show me the error of my ways but I refused their help and was set on "proving them wrong."

One day I asked my biological mother to come and get me. I packed my stuff and moved out ready to have fun! I didn't set out to use drugs or break the law, etc. I just wanted to hang out, go to movies, play sports and so forth, but in going from my dad's place to my mother's I didn't have any rules or guidelines. From the age of 15 to 17 I got involved in street gangs and was in and out of "Juvi" a number of times. I



was stabbed in a gang related fight. My lung collapsed but the blade missed my heart by inches which would have been fatal. I was in Intensive Care over night and spent several days in the hospital afterwards. I spent my 16th birthday in "Juvi" on a strong arm robbery charge. I did every drug I could get my hands on and I continued my immorality with numerous young and old women. That's all it took...two years of "having fun" trying to "prove them wrong" and at 17 I had a son!

When he came into my life I wanted to clean up my act and give him the life I once had. For a short time I tried, but I tried my way instead of turning to the Lord and to Christian brothers. Soon I fell right back into my old ways and I picked up a 15 year sentence when I was only 18 years old! Once I arrived in prison, I got into a prison gang and was doing everything

that comes with it. I'm ashamed of what I have done so I won't go into great detail, but to give you an idea of my history, I have 10 years "flat time" (*day by day credit for time served*) on a 15 year non agg (*not-aggravated time*). No good time and no work time (*"Good time" and "work time" are extra credits toward days served for good behavior*). Out of these 10 years I have only had a Line One (*good behavior with the most benefits*) status for 5 ½ months. The rest I've done as a Line 3 Medium (*bad behavior without benefits*) Custody Closed Custody and Segregation (*various benefits like periods out of their cells, dayroom time, etc.*). I have

been eligible for parole since 2004 but have been a Line 3 (*the worst security risk and thus not considered for parole*) all this time and I didn't care about parole. Nobody was going to tell me anything! Nobody was going to "show me up!" In 2002 I was confirmed and placed in Segregation as a threat to the safety of officers and other offenders. When S.T.G. (*Security Threat Group*) picked me up I was Medium Custody. In handcuffs and leg irons they walked me to Segregation. The Gang Officer came to tell me about a new program called G.R.A.D. (*a program for those who want to quit prison gangs*) for confirmed gang members. I spit in his face, laughed and told him nobody could break me. This got a good laugh from all my "home-boys." While in Segregation I worked myself up in my gang and was catching disciplinary cases left and right. I think my record was 30 some odd cases in a

few short months. I thought I was 10 feet tall and that superman didn't stand a chance against me. I was living my life to "prove to others" and it was all foolish reasoning.

In late 2008 I met a lady who really helped me by pointing me in the right direction and I got a visit from my son. It was the first time I had seen him since I left the outside. He wasn't 18 months old anymore. There stood a 10 year old boy with a lot of questions. Seeing him put his head on that glass window telling me that he loved me, he wanted me home, wanted me right, scared me! All the time I was in here trying to prove something, he was out there hurting. I had not had contact before with my son or my parents because they said that they would not be able to help me until I got my life together. For 9 years I wanted to do it my way but all along they were always there, wanting to help but wanting it to be the Lord's way and there be a change in me but I latched myself to a prison gang and to who I thought were my "Bros."

After visiting with my son, I came back to my cell and for the first time in a long time I broke down and cried. I pulled out a little old Bible I had in my weight bag and read Luke 15:11-32, the "Parable of the Lost Son." I remembered this story in the scriptures from when I was a youngster. I also did something that night I had not done in years, I cried out to the Lord. I prayed for His forgiveness. I repented of my sins and asked Him, "Lord, what is Your way? ...and please forgive my stubborn ways." The next day I signed up for

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G.R.A.D., gave up my status in the gang along with my long membership in it. All my so called "Bros" just couldn't understand it. At first they were mad, then they tried to make me feel guilty asking, "How can you do us like this after all this time. We're supposed to be bros," along with other threats, guilt trips and mind games that are used to keep bros in line.

Once I repented of my sins and gave my life to the Lord, I knew that G.R.A.D. would be the first step to make things right, not only for myself but also to keep the promise I made to my 10 year old son. Getting out of the gang was a burden lifted from my shoulders, a relief I had not felt in a long time but I only received that peace because it was a work of the Lord who guided me to do so.

I've been in G.R.A.D. for over a year now and don't have any regrets. I've just got my Line One status back. I have rebuilt a relationship with my son and my parents after so many years. I've given my life back to the Lord and know beyond a doubt that He is the reason that I've gotten to where I am now. I am continually grateful for the work He has done in my life. I pray for others who have been on that road of darkness and are still on it today. I pray that you will read these words and that you will also put your trust in the Lord. Just give your life to Him and you also can be set free.

If you are in prison and involved in gangs, I tell you from experience that's not the way to go. If you have kids on the outside, then get your priorities straight and the first thing to do is ask

the Lord into your life, then live for Him. Any male can have kids, but it takes a real man to be a father. It doesn't matter how many tattoos of their names you have on your body or how many photos of them you have on your wall. Get to know the Lord and He will guide you on how to be a real father. If you are not in prison and you have a Christian family as I did and you are struggling with the things I once did when young, I pray that you don't make the mistakes I've made. Be grateful for your parents and count your blessings because without the Lord's will and the Lord's way, you also could end up where I am now.

It all started with wanting to have a little fun.

B, Ramsey 1 Unit, TX

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My Third Bid in Prison Saved My Life

I am 38 years old and I am currently at the beginning of my third bid in the Texas Department of Corrections. As sad as that fact is, this incarceration most likely saved my life. I was on a path of destruction and Satan very much had a strong hold on my life in the form of addiction. The Bible says in 1 Peter that the enemy, the Devil, "prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour" and he most certainly found that in me. The good news, however, is that I don't have to live like that anymore. "Greater is He that lives in me than he that is in the world." I realize that I am going to have to face many trials and temptations when I get out, but it's reassuring to know that I am now a child of the most high God and on the winning side.

I decided to turn my life over to the Lord (for real this time) on October 18, 2010. I had been back in the County Jail a little over a month and looking back, that month without a doubt was the darkest and loneliest time in my life. Everything came crashing down around me and I realized just how much I had hurt the people I loved so much. How could I have put myself in this position yet again and let my family and children down the way I had? What kind of man does that? I was a man who was empty



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inside and who was selfish in every way possible. That was me and it was hard taking that look in the mirror. I was absolutely miserable and had nowhere else to turn. Believe me, I tried, but God finally had me and it was time to do business.

You see, I played with God for a long time, serving Him when it was convenient or when I thought I could get something out of it...

"Please God get me out of this situation and I'll never do that again." That was me for years. It's a dangerous thing to serve God

just for what He might be able to do for you instead of what He has already done for you. He sent His only Son to die so that we wouldn't have to die and so that we might have eternal life (John 3:16). That deserves our utmost respect and reverence.

Things became much more clear that October night when I cried out to God from my bunk and asked Him to come into my life for good this time, and I have been a different man ever since that day. 2Corinthians 5:17 says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, old things have passed away, all things have become new." A brand new start and a brand new direction is what I needed and that's exactly what God gave me.

Did things instantly get better? No. "Do not be deceived, God is not

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mocked. Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). My current situation is due to the fact that I chose to please my sinful nature instead of doing the right thing. I'm heading in the right direction now though and I believe with all my heart that God is going to restore everything Satan has taken from me.

Even though I'm in prison and the situation I'm in isn't good, I thank God everyday for the fact that He saved me and gave me another chance to get things right. Romans 8:28 says: "And we know that all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose." That doesn't mean that all that happens to us is good. God is

able, however, to turn every circumstance around for our long range good. I believe He is doing that right now and using this time to make me stronger so that when I do get out, I will be able to stand against Satan and live a godly life according to the word of God. Turning my life completely over to God was the best decision I have ever made and I encourage anyone who may be struggling to just let go and let God. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Amen!
W.Y., Buster Cole Unit, TX



DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY FOR JESUS CHRIST, HOW HE SAVED YOU FROM THE GUILT AND PENALTY OF YOUR SINS AND GAVE YOU A NEW LIFE?
Write to...P.O. Box 782,
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NO LONGER OF THIS WORLD

"A Testimony of the Power of God"

1. What is light as a feather but even the strongest man cannot hold it more than a few minutes?

2. Before Mount Everest was discovered, what was the highest mountain in the world?

3. A hunter pitched his tent and then hiked south for 5 miles. He turned east and hiked another 5 miles and finally he turned straight north and after hiking 5 miles found a bear tearing his tent apart. What color was the bear?

4. How far can a man with one leg hike into the woods?

5. Why is it against the law for a man living in North Carolina to be buried in South Carolina?

6. You are driving a bus. Four people get on and three get off, then eight people get on and ten people get off, then six people get on and 2 more people get off. What color are the bus driver's eyes?

7. A man left home running. He ran a ways and then turned left, ran the same distance and turned left again, ran the same distance and turned left again. When he got home there were two masked men there. Who were they?

There was a time when I thought my life was one big mess. You see, in 1992 I quit a gang called the Texas Syndicate (TS). TS has a rule that says the only way out of the gang is by death. And there I was, surrounded by some members of that gang who felt honor bound and obligated to carry out that rule.

In Texas prisons, and out on the streets, there have been many killings, shootings, stabbings, and assaults because of prison gang wars. One result of these Texas prison gang wars was that all confirmed gang members were considered to be a "threat to the physical safety of other inmates and staff" and were placed in Administrative Segregation (adseg). Consequently, I was placed in adseg in September of 1986 for the sole reason that I was a confirmed gang member of TS.

Adseg is a prison within a prison. We lived one man to a cell and recreated alone. We ate our meals in our cells and, except for showers, visits, medical appointments, and/or recreation (rec), the rest of the time we were locked in our cells.

Twice a week we were supposed to recreate outside for two hours. On the newer units, the outside rec was usually two people at a time. Each rec. yard was divided into two sections that were separated by a double chain link fence and bars. In the older units there

were up to 40 individual rec yards, one man to a yard.

In adseg, the chances of one convict getting to another were small. Even so, over the years there have been a few gang killings, even some non-gang killings and a lot of assaults in adseg. Some people cut out of their cells to get to someone. Some "speared" others as they passed in front of their cells, and, every once in a while, the doors have opened by "accident". So, even though the chances of getting hit are small, the chance was still there.

In August 1975 at age 21, I first went to prison. In May 1977, in Seattle Washington, I escaped from jail. Then on January 5, 1986 I was arrested in Texas on another charge and in April of 1986 I was given a 45 year aggravated sentence for armed robbery. An aggravated sentence means that I had to serve 15 calendar years to be eligible for my first parole review. At my first parole review date in January of 2001, I was given a two year set-off. At the end of my two-year set-off, in January of 2003, I was given a "serve all". My release date from Texas was set for October of 2004. My Texas time was running together with New Mexico sentences totaling 25 years for one count of 2nd degree murder, two counts of grand theft and a gun possession charge. I also have an immigration detainer for deportation to Mexico whenever I do get out.

I guess that most people would say that this was one big mess I was in. But as I sat there feeling sorry for myself, the Lord reminded me that, even though I live in this world, I am no



longer of this world. He reminded me that He is God who delivered Israel out of Egypt. He reminded me that He is the same Lord who healed all the people that came to Him in Israel 2000 years ago. He is the same Lord that raised Lazarus from the dead. He is the same Lord that healed the Gadarene demoniac. He is the same Lord who freed Peter and John, and later Paul and Silas, from prison cells. He is the same Lord who died for our sins and gave us LIFE through His resurrection. He is God Almighty, manifested in the flesh in Christ Jesus, living in me, and nothing is impossible for Him.

In August of 1989, in a prison cell at the Eastham Unit in Texas, I asked Jesus, IF HE WERE REAL, to come into my life and change it because I wanted to change and I knew I couldn't do it myself. HE IS REAL, and He has! Back then, I found scripture that I thought backed me up, like 1 Corinthians 7:20-22. I thought those verses meant that since I became a Christian while I was a gang member that I should stay in the gang. That is not what it means. Back then I truly believed that I could best serve Christ as a gang member by sharing the gospel with the rest of my gang brothers. I even told a few of them that I was a Christian, but most didn't want to hear about Jesus. A few even told me to be quiet about it before I got in trouble with the rest of the gang. I also figured I could serve God by example, that is, by living a good Christian life in the gang. Truth is, I didn't want to let go of my past and I wasn't living a good Christian life at all, or even a bad one for that matter.

Around 1991, I became confused regarding a few things about Christianity. On the radio I would hear one preacher teach about something and then I would hear another preacher teach almost the opposite thing. Sometimes even by using the same verses of scriptures! At times I would get so confused that I even began to have doubts about my salvation and Christianity.

God is faithful and whatever He starts He finishes. Around 1991, I finally understood that I couldn't be in Christ and in the gang at the same time. I knew then that the gang life style is wrong. But this was during my time of confusion, and I wasn't exactly too sure about a few things regarding Christ. So, I prayed something like, "Lord, I know that being in the gang is wrong but YOU know how confused I am right now. So, whenever YOU let me know beyond a shadow of a doubt that is what YOU want, I'll leave the gang." I began looking for signs from God.

On July 23, 1992, at the Michael Unit, in another adseg cell, I felt like the Lord asked me WHO was I going to follow. I didn't hear Him speaking out loud, but just as sure as prisons were built to lock people up, He asked me that! I answered, "You Lord". He let me know that I wasn't doing what I was saying or even doing what I thought I was doing! He let me know it was best to quit the gang. I came up with a lot of reasons for not quitting the gang like, "what if they kill me?" I came up with a lot of questions and to every single one of them; all He said was, "Trust Me."

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In short, the Lord let me know beyond a shadow of a doubt that if I were going to follow Him, it would be with all of my heart and all of my soul, and because I wanted to, not because I had to. And He kept saying for me to TRUST HIM. The next day I quit the gang. I was scared, not only of getting hurt, or maybe even killed, but even more scared of maybe having to hurt someone. There are some people in that gang that, just a short while earlier, I would have gladly killed or died for. While, for the rest of them, I was only honor bound and obligated to kill or die for.

In December of 1992, the Lord had another talk with me about something I did years ago. On May 5, 1977, while I was on escape, I killed a man in Seattle, Washington. There were no witnesses and I never told anyone about it. I had literally gotten away with murder. That wasn't the first time the Lord had talked to me about this murder. Back in late 1991, during my time of confusion, He talked to me about it for the first time. At that time I put up a pretty good mental fight for not confessing to the murder. But when I did agree to confess, a peace that words can't describe came over me. I even went as far as making plans to get the address for the District Attorney's office in Seattle.

Later that same day, as I was reading out of the book of Hebrews, I felt the Lord was talking to me again. I remembered how Abraham was told by God to sacrifice Isaac, his "son of the promise". I remembered how God stopped Abraham just as he was about

to do it. I felt the Lord had just wanted me to be willing to confess and now He was stopping me from confessing because He saw that I was willing to do so. After all, His Word does say, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." (Heb.10:17-18).

In November of 1992, the Lord had talked with me about this same thing and at that time I had again used the same scriptures to not do it. I even felt the devil was trying to cause more confusion in my life. But just to be sure, I asked the Lord to show me beyond a shadow of a doubt what I should do. He did so in December of 1992. Please understand that confession to past crimes IS NOT a requirement from God. Our Lord allowed me to see that IN MY SITUATION it was best I confess to this crime.

At the Michael Unit there were volunteer chaplains that visited us. They could see us and talk with us through the screens on our doors and we had to talk loud to be able to hear each other. As a result of that, there wasn't much privacy. In January of 1993, I asked to see a volunteer in private. Such a meeting was unheard of back then. Even so, a meeting was arranged for me to meet with two of the volunteers. At that meeting, for the first time in almost 16 years, I told another person about the murder I committed in 1977. After talking with them, they arranged for me to see the head chaplain. I saw him within an hour. After talking and praying with all three

of them some more, they arranged for me to speak with some officers from Internal Affairs. I gave them some details and they notified the Seattle Police Department.

In April of 1993, I gave a full, taped confession to a Seattle detective. Several weeks later a warrant was issued. By July 1993, I was at the King County Jail in Seattle, Washington. I pleaded guilty and on October 1, 1993, I was sentenced to a consecutive term of 25 years, with a minimum term of 20 years. That meant that I wouldn't be eligible for parole for **At least 16 years, AFTER** I left Texas and I was still facing more years in adseg, and possibly 16 more years flat time in Texas.

Looking at all this through the world's eyes, my life was a big mess. But I am no longer of this world and I try not to look at my life, or anything, through the world's eyes anymore.

Some have argued, and other's will argue, that I didn't have to quit the gang and that I didn't have to confess to the murder, and they are right, I didn't have to do what I did. Christ accepts us just as we are, and in Christ we are totally forgiven. God allowed me to see what it truly means to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. That's why I quit the gang. Christ is my Life and my Righteousness; this is a righteousness that comes from God in faith. In forgiveness, there is nothing any of us can do to become more holy. Confessing to the unsolved murder did not make God love me any more than He already does, any more than not

confessing would have made God love me any less.

So why did I confess to the murder? It was a matter of trust and conscious sake. Not my conscious, but other's. So that whenever I look someone in the eye and say that they can trust Christ with every fiber of their being, it is because I am doing the same. I trust in Christ with everything that makes me, me. I am in the world but I am no longer of this world.

Sure I would like to be out of prison—yesterday if possible! But I've learned to be content in whatever situation I am in. And I know WHO my strength is (see Phil. 4:11-13). I've learned that to be truly content comes from knowing Christ LIVES IN ME, and not from anyone or anything. Even knowing this, there are times when life is not easy. I've learned from experience that the times I'm not content are when I take my eyes off Jesus. By taking my eyes off Jesus, I mean that my focus is on my situation and/or circumstances, or on my old self, and not on Jesus and who I am IN HIM. But when I keep my eyes on Him, He makes it possible for me to be content, even in here.

In a way, I can compare my life with walking on water while there are storms all around me. Every time I've taken my eyes off Jesus and looked at the storm, I began to sink. But every time I've put my eyes back where they belong and have called out to Him, He has kept me walking on the water (see Matt. 14:24-31).

On December 3, 1997, after 11 years and 4 months, I was let out of

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adseg. After having spent over 18 years on the Texas term and facing another 16 years of flat time there plus 25 years in Washington, I WAS FREE! Free from the wages of, and the power of sin, but most of all, I have ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS! I have the Holy Spirit living in me, guiding me, and teaching me who I am in Christ. It pleased God, my Father, to reveal Christ in me! I don't walk on water and I doubt I ever will. There are plenty of storms going on around me but I am in Christ and Christ is in me, and Christ is greater than anyone or anything in this world. If you aren't in Christ, you can be. All it takes is SINCERELY asking Him to come into your life. And whether you are in prison or out in the world, no matter where you are, you can also learn to be content right where you are right now, and the peace of God which surpasses all knowledge and understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

J.A., Coyote Ridge, WA

RIDDLE ANSWERS

1. Your breath
2. Mount Everest
3. White because it had to be a polar bear at the North Pole, otherwise he would have been 5 miles away from his tent.
4. Half way, after that he is hiking out of the woods.
5. If he is living he should not be buried!
6. YOU are driving the bus!
7. A baseball catcher and the umpire.

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"A Testimony of the Power of God"

WHAT'S YOUR TESTIMONY?

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RIDDLES

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There's Got to Be a Better Way!

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I JUST WANTED TO HAVE A LITTLE FUN

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The Lord Jesus Christ said, "You MUST be born again."

Some Christians who are only and sufficiently a part of the church the Lord is building, of which all and only His children belong (Acts 2:47)

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