

Prison Epistles

"Victory Over Darkness"

...is the perfect example of how I would like to explain and describe my testimony as a new creation in Christ. Today as I stand here in jail wrongfully convicted along with a life sentence, the only thought in my mind is that this experience was truly needed and necessary for me to understand and grasp the concept of what is God's love for me and everyone in the existence in which we live.

This experience has allowed me to truly reflect back on my life's decisions and choices that caused me to find myself in my current situation. At times I find myself in disbelief that I am here living in this condition but unfortunately the reality of it is true.

I am here because, even though innocent of the crime for which I am convinced God knew I needed to be

here. I chose this path a long time ago while in my life of darkness and corruption. This is the only way I would have left my old life behind and walked into the light of God's new path of light and out of the misery where I once wandered aimlessly and without true purpose.

Growing up I was never introduced or properly taught the word of God. My mother was always working and I never had a father around to guide me into the adult years. My mother did her best but as a Catholic all she did was light candles and say prayers to Mary,

which to me never made sense as a child.

When I became an adult I could feel the presence of the Lord but I always chose to ignore His callings.

Instead, I chose to listen to the wrong mentors

and role models of the criminal underworld. I chose the evil and wicked life of selfish pleasures and disobedience that ultimately landed me in jail at the age of 31.



I thank God He sent an older Christian man here to the prison who told me of God's plan for me, and for all mankind, that Jesus Christ not only paid for all our sins but He actually gives us a new life with a plan and purpose for each of us if we will only surrender our lives to Him.

I felt as though Christ was speaking words of comfort directly to me through this man's ministry at the Johnson County Jail. I saw him as a believer walking in the true meaning of Christianity, passing God's grace on to us in every Bible study he conducted. He showed us God's way when we read, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* in Ephesians 2:8-9 in the Bible. It was by receiving that gift from God by faith that Jesus Christ became my Savior and gave me a new life not only here and now but for all eternity!

This Christian man made it clear that we are living in a time when Jesus Christ will actually live inside each of us if we invite Him to and then it is up to us to seek out the truth in God's word of who we now really are as "new creatures in Christ" (1Corinthians 5:17).

It is obvious to me that my turning point was a few days after my arrest. That's when I began to reflect on the path I had chosen at a young age. Now, at the age of 33 years old I understand why this was necessary for me to experience this

life altering change. Without coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and true Christianity as a personal relationship with Him, not just religion, I would never have changed. I would have remained in the same dark path and mind set as before.

This imprisonment has saved my life in a way much more beneficial to myself as God intended, rather than dying at an early age with a meaningless life and a meaningless death.

Adan Gaona, Gatesville, TX



Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.

Don't raise your voice, improve your argument.

Never let the things you want make you forget the things you have.

Don't do something permanently stupid just because you're temporarily upset.

No one looks back on their life and remembers the nights they got plenty of sleep.

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

NO LONGER OF THIS WORLD

*“A Testimony of the Power of God
in the Life of Juan R. Aguilar”*

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There was a time when I thought my life was one big mess. You see, in 1992 I quit a gang named 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 was 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 chances are 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 that 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, 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

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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! One example is speaking in tongues. Some believe that speaking

in tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, others don't. 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, 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



Me with some Christian friends from Texas.

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."

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 or maybe even having to kill again. It isn't easy to kill someone; it's even harder to kill someone you care for. 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 fight for not confessing to the murder. But when I did agree to confess, a peace that

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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

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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 very 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 (Matthew. 14:24-31).

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

Juan Aguilar, Connell, WA

JESUS CHRIST SAID:

***“I am the way,
the truth and
the life.***

**No one comes to
the Father except
through me.”**

(John 14:6)

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I Don't Care!

A fireman dashes into burning building to save you and later dies of smoke inhalation.



Would you think,
"I DON'T CARE!"

Only one person can survive on the rations through this freezing storm.



Your partner deliberately walks off into the storm with nothing to save you and is never seen again.

Would you think,
"I DON'T CARE!"



Your oxygen tank malfunctions while diving in very deep water. Your friend slips off his tank and gives it to you but he dies while struggling to get to the surface.

Would you think,

"I DON'T CARE!"

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God placed your sins on His beloved Son ...

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Jesus Christ suffered to bring us to God ...

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18)

"For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13)

Jesus Christ washed our sins away with His own blood...

"...To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, (Revelation 1:5)

Jesus Christ has been, and even now, is calling you TO HIMSELF...

"That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." (John 1:9)

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying by what death He would die." (John 12:32-33)

Almighty God has shown His great love for you ...

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." (1 John 4:9)

We really hope

YOU CARE

for He cares for you!



The plane is spiraling out of control. The pilot shoves the only parachute to

you and insists you jump, and you do, as he rides the plane into the ground.

Would you think,

"I DON'T CARE!"

NOW HERE'S THE REAL STORY...



Almighty God has shown His great love for you ...

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." (1 John 4:9)

We really hope

YOU CARE

for He cares for you!

RIDDLES

Riddle answers, page 11

					1										2
	3		4												
					5										
			6												
7															
							8			9					
	10														
11								12							

- 1. What has to be broken before you can use it??**
- 2. I'm tall when I'm young, and I'm short when I'm old. What am I?**
- 3. What month of the year has 28 days?**
- 4. What question can you never honestly answer "Yes" to?**
- 5. There's a one-story house in which everything is yellow. Yellow walls, yellow doors, yellow furniture. What color are the stairs?**
- 6. You walk into a room that contains a match, a kerosene lamp, a candle and a fireplace. What would you light first?**
- 7. David's parents have three sons: Snap, Crackle, and what's the name of the third son?**
- 8. What can you hold in your left hand but not in your right?**
- 9. It belongs to you, but other people use it more than you do. What is it?**

ACROSS

- You _ _ _ _ be born again to enter God's kingdom.
- Moses lifted this up in the wilderness
- Unbelievers are already this
- Name of the man talking with Jesus
- Heart felt belief in Christ causes this kind of life.
- How to enter the kingdom of God
- Jesus Christ DID come to earth to do this.

DOWN

- Evidence that Christ was a teacher come from God
- God so loved this
- Spiritual birth causes _ _ _ _ _ children
- Jesus Christ did NOT come to earth to do this.
- Flesh birth causes _ _ _ _ _ children
- God _ _ _ _ His only Son to prove His love for al mankind.

"For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"
(Romans 10:13)

God Can and Will Change You...

But Not Until You Ask Him

I really don't know where to start. You hear of so many men telling these great stories of how they had to overcome impossible odds. Mine is not that kind of a story. From my youth I was always trying hard to please people and be something I was not. I spent many years trying to make people accept me. I was in my late teens when I started trying the worldly pleasures of pot, drinking, sex, cocaine and other bad things. I thought that if I would get married it would help me be responsible and give me a true identity. Wrong! I was still missing someone and something very badly.

In my youth it was normal for me to go to church on Sunday. Because my mom went, everyone went. However, I wasn't hearing anything that was being taught so I did not learn anything. Though I had a form of godliness (religion) I definitely denied God's right to rule my life.

With drugs in my life it was hard to tell right from wrong no matter if it was a business that was hiring or just selling some dope to make some easy cash and stay high. I was fighting with my wife in front of our children. Both of us were using and abusing each other. I was badly out of control after countless times of this but I see now that even

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then God was watching over and waiting for me.

The Bible says that the Lord chastens those He loves. While I was awaiting trial I was determined that I was not going to go to jail. If I made the \$120,000 bond I was going to jump bail but no one would post that bond for me. I was sent to prison for 8 years for aggravated robbery. That was the worst and the best eye-opening experience I ever had. I came to prison with low self-esteem, hate and malicious thoughts about everything and everyone, but God changed all this when I finally surrendered to Him.

My cellmate constantly asked me to go to the church service to hear him play "Amazing Grace" on the piano. After about 4 months I finally went and I heard my cellmate play and the minister preach as well. I picked up a Bible after the service and began reading as a pastime thing. One evening

I started reading the book of Philemon in the Bible about a slave who had run away and then became a Christian. That story gripped my heart. The next morning I went to the phone to call home and found a Bible tract on salvation laying there by the phone. I picked up the tract and went back to my cell without even making the call. I lay down on my bunk and crawled under the cover to be away from everyone. I confessed to God my need for the Lord Jesus Christ who had paid the full penalty for my sins and received Him into my heart. I told the Lord that I did not want to be who I was anymore. I



said that I needed Him to change me by the power of the Holy Spirit. From then on I devoted myself to serving the Lord. That was in August of 1995.

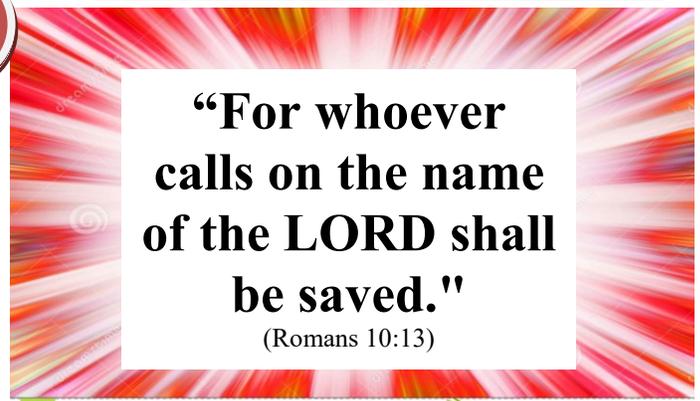
Unfortunately, after getting out of prison I strayed from the Lord and His way and soon found myself back in prison. Now, here for the second time, I think I have finally learned what the Lord said, *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."* I still have troubles but I try to keep my eye on the Lord. And, if I fall, I run to the Lord confessing my faults and He cleanses me as He promised that He would in *1John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

I have let down my wife, my children and my friends and yet the Lord Jesus Christ still sees value in me. If he can value me he will also value you! I like to remember what the Lord told Cain, *"And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."* By the grace of God we can rule over the sin in our lives. It is your choice, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13). He will take away the burdens you have been living with for so long.

Sherman Griffin, Huntsville, Texas



- 1. An egg
- 2. A candle
- 3. All of them
- 4. "Are you asleep?"
- 5. One story, no stairs!
- 6. A match
- 7. David
- 8. Your right elbow
- 9. Your name



X-WORD PUZZLE ANSWERS

				M	U	S	T				W
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	S		S	E	R	P	E	N	T		R
	P			A							L
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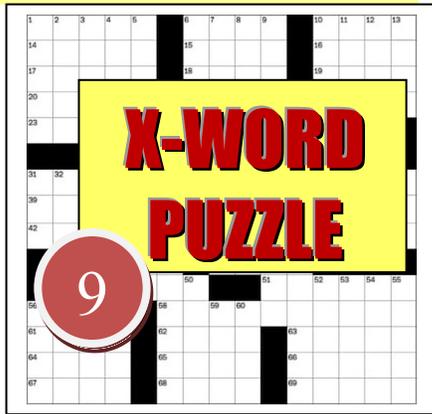
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I DON'T CARE!!! 7

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GOD CAN AND WILL CHANGE YOU BUT... 10



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Summer 2022

Prison Epistles

SEND YOUR TESTOMONY FOR JESUS CHRIST TO...

Sent to inmates and others all over the state of Texas and beyond.

Also published on the Internet!

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

P.O. Box 1181
Joshua, TX 76058

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