

"Bridges to Life," and a Positive Peer Group that would give us the opportunity to talk to new inmates coming into the facility about the dangers of gang life and how to make positive choices, both while they were locked up and when they got out. Inmates talking to inmates about positive choices - now that was a change. Later, I was blessed with a new job. I was accepted into the K9 program and earned my Master's in Dog Training. With that I was able to train service dogs. I cannot express how rewarding that is. With acceptance into the K9 program came a move into Sterling's incentive living unit (I-Pod). In January of 2014 I was blessed with a move to Sterling's minimum security yard. Over a five year period God had taken me from Colorado's highest security state prison to a minimum security yard training service dogs. I went from servant of Satan to servant of Jesus Christ. Friend, only the power of God can affect transformation like that.

I think the biggest blessings have to be all the people God has put in my life. He always places the right person in my path at exactly the right time. He has allowed my testimony, the example of my changed life, to be a spark. A spark that has helped ignite a fire for Christ inside the hearts of other men as well. Over a three year period, four more men - men who now saw God's faithfulness in my own life - chose to leave that very same gang for a life of service to Jesus Christ. Each of these men, walking in the power of God's Holy Spirit, is a living testimony to the power of God to completely transform a man's heart. Their lives continue to be a daily witness to His great love, grace, and mercy. When other inmates see these men serving Christ, going to church, going to Bible studies, talking to other men about Christ, it touches something inside. The thought becomes, "Well, if these guys can do it, then so can I." It becomes okay. What a powerful witness - and all to the glory of God. Remember, how you live as a servant of Christ matters. Your daily walk can help lead people to Christ, or it can cause them to curse His name and run the other way.

Forgiveness is such a precious gift. I have been forgiven so much. By His example, and through His love, I have also learned to forgive. Through the love of Christ my father and I now have a consecrated relationship, and he has accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior and has an equally powerful testimony. We now have a healthy relationship - God did that. I realize now that God had a plan for me all along. Every negative experience in my life, the man that I've been and haven't been, all the pain I've felt - and, more importantly, all the pain I've caused - God has been able to use. By the grace of God my experiences in life have equipped me to be able to talk to and help men that I otherwise never could have. No child should ever have to live the life I did, but the sad truth is too many have. My story isn't unique. When I said earlier that I was surrounded by men who were just like I was, I meant that. They are just as lost, just as hurt, just as scared, just as insecure; and most of the time, just as ashamed of the men they have become. Many of them have done things that they think God could never, ever forgive. Friends, there is only one

person who can help men like these - Jesus Christ. They need His cleansing blood to wash them clean and heal them. They need His Holy Spirit to transform them and recreate them. I can relate to that on a very personal level. I understand that. Don't we all?

I praise God for all the opportunities He's given me to talk about His forgiveness and His faithfulness. No matter how bad I became, God never gave up on me. That's a comfort that I am determined to share with everyone I come in contact with. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 ESV). Isn't that what it's all about - sharing the love of Jesus Christ with a lost and hurting world? One of my goals is to be able to work with and help kids who've had a rough life. Maybe I went through some of what I did so that I would be able to help someone else who has been through something similar. If I can, I count it worth the cost.

Friends, the war has already been won. Our Savior has defeated the enemy. But there is one truth that my life has made perfectly clear: if you do not stand for Christ, you will fall for the devil. Our foundation has to be Jesus Christ. He is the Rock of our Salvation, and He is my Savior. I love walking with Him, and I look forward to every new morning. I wake up knowing that I am an ambassador representing the King of Kings, and He is my best friend. Sure, life continues to throw curve balls. But I rest in Christ. I die to self every day. I surrender every day. It is only by His strength that I am able to stand and walk. If I have done anything good in this life, it is only because He did it through me. By myself I am a handful of dust; but in Him, I am a son of the Living God. If you don't know Him, get on your knees and cry out to Him. He will give you new life and a sure hope. He is faithful, and He loves you. Even you.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:4-7, 13 ESV).

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"The word of God is not imprisoned." – 2 Timothy 2:9

REPRESENT

A former shot-caller in one of Colorado's most violent prison gangs tells how he came to represent Jesus Christ



My name is Daniel Scott Dias, and this is my testimony. I am a father of one, and brother in Christ to many others. My road to Christ has been a bumpy one, and my struggles with character, with addictions, and with gang life almost destroyed me. I've been about as rotten a person as a man can be, and yet in His love and mercy God saved me. Let me tell you how it happened. I once was lost, but now I am found. Oh sweet, amazing grace...

I was born on July 4th, 1969 to Daniel Dias, Sr. and Sharlo Smith. My father was a mentally unstable alcoholic, and my mother, for lack of a better word, was stuck. My father was a bad drunk, and after getting wasted would take his violent rage out on my mother, sister, and me until, shortly after my ninth birthday, my mother finally found the courage to leave. (Those first nine years of my life were so terrifying that the Lord in His mercy has removed them from my memory.) After the divorce, for whatever reason, I had to stay with my father. The beatings only grew worse, and as I got older I became horribly insecure and my heart grew cold and hard and choked with hate. My father, struggling with his own insecurities, continually made me feel like I was nothing so that he could feel like a something. I had to be a nobody for him to be a somebody. While other fathers were teaching their kids how to love, mine taught me how to hate.

As the years passed the beatings eventually stopped, but that emotionally abusive father-son relationship continued well into my adult years. I developed an inflated pride that became a type of counter-balance for my overwhelming sense of insecurity. Like my father did with me, I took my insecurities out on other people. I breathed hate and fed on fear. I was both victim and victimizer. It became a cycle of abuse that led me further and further down self-destructive paths. Many people who end up addicted to drugs later wonder how it ever happened. For me, it was just the next logical step. I was ten years old when I started doing drugs.

For a while getting high was a magnificent escape. It allowed me to let go of all the conditioned hate and anger that tore at my heart, and drown out all the thoughts that usually held my emotions like a clenched fist. When I was high I didn't have a care in the world. Rationalizing my drug habit was easy: I simply blamed it on depression and hate for my father. But it wasn't long before the same drugs that had been my best escape turned into my biggest problem. I started, like so many kids, with marijuana. At age fifteen, marijuana turned into cocaine. At seventeen, methamphetamine; then heroin, and on and on for the next thirty years. My drug use separated me from friends, from sports, from all the things kids are supposed to do growing up. My hunger for drugs was relentless. It was a consuming fire that burned completely out of control, and I was soon committing petty crimes and stealing from family members. I was becoming the thing I most hated, which was my father. It wasn't long before my actions led to their inevitable and justified end: prison. In October of 1995 I committed second degree murder and received a 45 year sentence.

For most people, prison would spell rock bottom. But for me, prison spelled home. I found myself surrounded by men of like mind, and if similar ideology and values determine who

your family members are, then, friends, I had found my family. They were a popular white prison gang whose tendency toward violence attracted me. To them, the rest of the prison population was theirs to use and manipulate. I was a wolf among wolves, and in a culture where well thought out hate and a willingness to be violent are considered admirable traits, I became someone who was both looked up to and feared. My abilities to fight, to manipulate, and to provoke fear immediately set me apart, and I quickly climbed the ranks. People say the group didn't start out with those intentions, but like anything that isn't founded on Christ, it quickly deteriorated into the destructive monster that it was - and I fit right in.

Okay, so where did God fit into all this? For me at the moment, He really didn't. I knew God was real. I knew a bit about Him, but the only time I needed Him was when I was in trouble. I would get into a fight or get a hot UA, go to the hole, and then try to make deals with God. Deals that I never intended to keep. I would tell Him that if He got me out I would be a better person, or go to church, but when I got out I was right back in the mix. I wanted God to be a get out of jail free card, and nothing else. But God doesn't make underhanded deals. He wants every bit of you, and that wasn't part of my plan. What I didn't know at the time was that God had His own plan for my life - and compared to His, mine was only so much dust. I still had so much to learn.

One of the things that I learned was that fellow inmates weren't the only ones who considered me a threat. I was now a known name in an organization that the Department of Corrections termed a Security Threat Group (STG). I had become a threat to the security of the facility, and in 2004 I was removed from population and placed in ad-seg (administrative segregation), which is like a prison inside of prison. Colorado State Penitentiary (CSP), Colorado's highest security state prison. I was locked in isolation 23 hours a day, and only let out for one hour to shower and to exercise in another empty cell with a pull-up bar in it. I hated ad-seg. And the worst part? It wasn't that I was there; it was that I knew I belonged there. What had I become?

Four and a half years passed, and so much changed. I had time alone to think, time to read, time to listen. I completed all the required classes, saw all the boards, went through the transition program, and eventually made my way back out to population. They sent me to Buena Vista Correctional Facility, and the day I made it onto the yard a fellow member of the gang attacked another inmate in the chow hall while we were eating. It was an assault that I had nothing to do with. But gang intelligence officers decided that since I was there I must have played a part, and I was sent right back to ad-seg. I had been out in population for a grand total of 18 hours. Now I was back in the place I had grown to hate the most. I couldn't understand it. That's when the

Lord spoke to my spirit and said, "This is your last chance. You can go be the monster that you portray yourself to be, or you can follow me and I will bless you." What I understand now is, that was my "road to Damascus" experience. That was the moment that Jesus Christ revealed Himself to me. My sin burned in me, and I finally knew the man that I had become. I saw my sin in contrast to His holiness, and in that same moment I fell to my knees and cried out to Him: SAVE ME!

I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior that day, and I gave Him all that I was, to use however He wanted. Since then I have given Him everything I ever gave to the gang life, to drugs, to women, to my hatreds and insecurities. I gave Him my all in all. And do you know what He did? He saved me.

I left ad-seg in 2011 for the very last time, and went to Sterling Correctional Facility for the new Thinking for a Change program. This was Colorado's new transitional program out of ad-seg. This time I was determined to represent Jesus Christ and nothing else. So you can imagine, when I came out talking about the saving Blood of Christ, the gang didn't know what to do. God, on the other hand - He had a plan. It wasn't long before the gang leadership came and told me that they recognized the change in my heart. I had changed so completely that now, instead of spearheading the drama, I was trying to make peace in all their issues. That prompted them to do something that had never been done before. They offered me an official retirement from the gang. Again, Christ showed me His power to break chains and evil strongholds. He had set me free to serve Him and Him alone. Praise God!

The end of my former life was only the beginning of my new life as a servant of Jesus Christ. The blessings that God bestowed on me were so amazing that, if you didn't know better, you'd think it was a story from a movie. He had delivered me from sin and death through the cleansing blood of His Son. My addictions were gone. My hate was swallowed up in Christ's love - and that love was overflowing, reaching out and touching person after person. It was contagious. He had delivered me from the bonds of gang life, and for the next few years He allowed me to work with the facility's gang coordinators to try and institute a gang tattoo removal program. Over time they removed my name from all STG and gang affiliation lists. As far as the Department of Corrections was concerned I was 100% gang-free. I was now seen for who I was in Jesus Christ, and not who I was in the gang.

I was also given the opportunity to work with the facility to bring in a number of new, positive programs and classes. By that time God had blessed me with a job as a Chaplain's assistant, and that gave me the chance to talk to the administrators whose approval was needed to get started. They turned out to be such good programs: "Authentic Manhood,"