

On the way to pray with that preacher, before I even reached the bars, the Lord Jesus Christ **met** me in salvation, much like the father who ran to the prodigal son, when the father saw the son moving toward home from afar. **Just so, God met me.** And I knew forgiveness, acceptance, a new beginning and a new life that was cleansed from my past sins and crimes against God and man.

Soon after that I pleaded guilty, without going to trial, to a life sentence for first degree murder. Additionally, I pleaded guilty to a separate armed robbery charge for which they gave me 60 years.

Shortly after that I was sent to the infamous F.S.P./"East Unit" near Starke, Florida to begin my life sentence.

God went with me and has kept me all these many years. For 34 years, God has been faithful to me; and He always will be.

Jesus Christ IS my life. Truly, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Ask Him and He'll do the same for you. **Jesus really does love you!** Jesus said, "You have not because you ask not!"

ASK!



Sin takes you farther than you want to go,
Reaps a harvest bigger than you sow;

Keeps you longer than you want to stay,
Costs you more than you want to pay.

Sin steals your treasure, corrupts your pleasure and
Brings sorrow without measure!

Sin steals your song, get's you believing wrong, and
Strings you along!

Scripture References

«If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.»
1 John 1:9

«But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:» John 1:12

«Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.» Acts 4:12

«All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.» John 6:37

«Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.» II Corinthians 5:17

«For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.» John 3:16

«Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.» 1 John 3:16

«That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.» Romans 10:9-10

«For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.»
Philippians 1:21

«But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.» Romans 5:8

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God's
Grace:

34 Years in Prison
with Jesus

Personal Testimony of
Larry J. Ries—033886

Current Inmate
of the
Florida State Dept of Corrections

Released October 31, 2006

Thirty-four years ago I came to prison with a fresh life sentence for first degree murder and 60 years for armed robbery...

Thirty-four years ago I came to prison with a fresh life sentence for first degree murder and 60 years for armed robbery. Arrested a mere four days after celebrating my 24th birthday, it would be a long haul before I found something to celebrate again. Stunned, shocked and horrified at my own actions, I fell into a deep, dark pit of utter despair – for all practical purposes, my life, and all opportunities and possibilities for leading a “good life,” was over. Finished. Done. All hope, gone.

I remember staring at a bare light bulb late at night in the city jail shortly after my arrest. With the cry of my heart to a God I knew OF but did NOT know, “Is this it? Is this why I was born? To live for 24 years and end up like this? Why”!?

As I sat on that hard-steel bunk, with glazed eyes unfocused and gazing out through the cell bars into the darkened hallway, all I could see for my present and future was unending, unrelenting darkness, sadness, pain, anguish, turmoil, loss and REGRET for the life I’d taken, the damage I’d done and for the potential life I’d thrown away in a moment of time.

After sentencing, the judge asked me if my parents and family knew I was in jail and I told him “No.” He said, “You need to let them know.” I responded, “I can’t hurt them like that; better that they just never find out what happened to me, than to tell them I killed a man and will be in prison for the rest of my life.” The judge said, “It would be harder on them to never know what happened to you, where you are, or whether you are alive or dead. You need to call them.”

I reluctantly agreed to do so. It was the middle of the afternoon. My Mom would usually be home from her job as a school cook at

that time of day. My Dad, a self-employed carpenter, would usually **never be home** at that time of day! I called collect and my Dad answered the phone and I could hear the joy in his voice to hear from me. At that point, with the bailiff standing a few feet away and because I’d had a sometimes strained relationship with my Dad, hearing his obvious happiness and joy at hearing my voice and knowing I was about to devastate and break his heart, was the most excruciating thing I could have experienced or imagined. Still, I was “glad” it was him and not Mom. Doing my desperate best to not break down, and not doing so very successfully, between barely choked back sobs, I told my father I was in the county jail courthouse, had killed a man during a robbery and had a life sentence in prison for my crime. I could **hear** my Dad’s pain and anguish – so strong and deep, I could almost **feel** the physical presence of it on the other end of the phone; me, in Florida, and my Dad, in the small farming town in South Dakota where I was raised. With voice cracking, he said to me, “Larry, if you needed some money, why didn’t you call and ask? We would have helped you! Larry, what am I going to tell your mother?????” With that last statement, I totally “lost it,” bailiff standing there or not. **That phone call was the hardest thing I have ever had to do.** It still haunts me to this day.

My Dad died on Wednesday, November 9, 1994, about 6:00 a.m. in a hospital bed in Aberdeen, South Dakota. Because of my sin and my crime, I couldn’t be there **with** him or for my mother; my place and my duty as the eldest child and son. Our crimes and our sins never hurt just a few nor the poor victims only; but many loved ones, ours and theirs. Oh, that I would have thought of that before I allowed my life to spiral out of control.

While in the county jail awaiting trial, possibly facing a death sentence, a lay preacher would come in the walkway outside our cellblock each weekend to share the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ, and he would testify of the goodness, mercy and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ’s dying on a cruel, Roman cross and of the shedding of His pure, sinless blood for MY “sin crimes.” He told us that God would forgive our sins, (wipe our “rap sheet” clean!) no matter how horrible or great, **cleanse us** from sin and blood guiltiness and make us into a brand new creation, a brand new man, with a fresh start and hope for tomorrow, **REGARDLESS** of what the duly appointed jury and judge decreed for us.

At first I listened to him, or so I told myself, out of appreciation and respect for him taking his time (a working father of five kids) to care about men like us. Many mocked him. After he’d preached the Gospel one particular weekend afternoon, I couldn’t sleep. All that week it felt, as I later heard an old country preacher say, “Like two mad cats tied inside a gunny sack,” fighting inside my heart. I didn’t know or understand it then, but later, I came to know that was the Holy Spirit convicting and convincing me of my need for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and warring against the enemy of my soul; the devil, and my own sinful human nature. **How I thank Jesus that He won out!**

I couldn’t wait until the next preaching service. As he always did, the preacher gave a salvation invitation at the end of his Gospel message. I practically fell over myself, and others, in the cellblock dayroom, getting to the bars to pray with him! I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was a desperately lost and undone sinner in need of a savior and a new start and a new life.