

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my testimony, even though at first I wanted to keep it private.

I was born into a family involved in an organization often called a gang by the name of the Gangster Disciples (GD's). My parents, along with most of my extended family were heavily involved in gang activity, believing they were protecting our community from corrupt police and rival gangs that sold drugs and committed violence.

As a result, it was expected that I would follow the same path.

Sadly, this was the reality for many Black American families in Chicago during the 80s and 90s. I can't imagine the struggles my mother faced—the danger, pain, and poverty, compounded by the racism she endured. It shaped her into a woman who did whatever she could to provide for her children. One of the ways she did this was by discovering that if a child had behavioral problems or learning disabilities, she could receive social security benefits—around \$900 per child at that time. This led to my siblings and me being encouraged to perform poorly in school and act out, almost like wild animals. I remember an incident at a park where my mom saw a girl bump into my stepsister and, without hesitation, urged us to attack.

At that time, it felt like there was no hope for me beyond becoming just another young thug—caught up in drugs, robberies, and gang violence.

My fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Winterfead, once told me I would be dead or in prison before I turned 21 after I brought a gun to school, planning to retaliate against someone who had disrespected me.

That harsh prediction stuck with me.

Things took a dramatic turn when my stepfather got into trouble with a local gang. After a violent confrontation, we were given 48 hours to leave our home or face dire consequences. That night, they performed a drive-by-shooting at our apartment to make sure we got the message.

We moved to Minneapolis to stay with my stepfather's cousin, then after a few months, we relocated to St. Paul, Minnesota. I continued my criminal lifestyle there, which led to my arrest. From the age of 13 to 24, I bounced between jails, prisons, and mental institutions, facing charges ranging from vandalism to attempted murder.

Life behind bars became my twisted sanctuary, where I learned how to survive and even rose to a leadership position in a gang.

I began to dream of a different life while serving time in solitary confinement at Oak Park Heights. I remembered a young lady I had met at a church event as a teenager, and I envisioned what life could be like married to her.

I was released in 2011 and found her. But my lifestyle—living with multiple women and committing crimes—drove her away.

Heartbroken but determined, I violated my parole, knowing it would push her even further away. After my release, I reached out to her, and she reluctantly agreed to visit me at the halfway house.

That night, something changed in me. I realized I wanted a future with her. About a month later, I proposed, and our relationship blossomed. Samantha was passionate about her faith in Jesus and the truth of the Bible, while I remained skeptical. Despite our differences, she never stopped sharing her faith with me.

While she was focused on her education, I was focused on becoming “Hood Famous.” My plans included robbing banks and eliminating rivals. However, I was arrested before I could take action on those plans.

I thank God for intervening that night—had I been successful in my plans, I likely would have faced a well-deserved life sentence.

Sitting in Ramsey County Jail, facing serious charges as a felon in possession of a firearm, I was looking at 15 years if the federal officials pursued my case. For the first time, I began to consider the God Samantha spoke of. When she visited me and confronted me about my behavior, she assured me, “I’m not going to leave you.

I will never leave you. I am a Christian woman.” That statement made me wonder if there was any truth to the love of Jesus Christ for me.

I remember arguing with God, saying, “If You really love me, why do You allow me to keep getting locked up?” I felt I wasn't so bad. I wasn't a child molester or a rapist. Besides, I was loyal to the streets and my gang.

As I argued with God, I felt a profound realization hit me: “You’ve been loyal to all these people and to the streets, but you’ve been disloyal to the One who died for you.”

That truth shook me to my core.

I had spent my life seeking love and loyalty from imperfect people, while Jesus had shown me the ultimate loyalty through His sacrifice of Himself on the cross for my sin.

Over the next day, I tried to shake these thoughts from my mind, but the more I pondered it, the heavier the burden became. In May, overwhelmed by the conversations I had had with Samantha about Jesus, I dropped to my knees and begged God to forgive me and to save me. That day, I was gloriously saved.

When I stood up, an unexplainable peace filled my heart. The weight of facing 15 years in prison evaporated. I was saved! More than anything, I wanted to show my loyalty to God like never before. In May 2012, I was redeemed from a life of darkness, and now I'm on my way to eternity in Heaven.

If you are reading this and feel a tug on your heart, I invite you to pray and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Open your heart to Him, just as I did, and experience the transformative love and grace that can change your life forever.

No matter your past, His love is greater, and He is waiting to welcome you home.

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