

# Sinner Yet Saved

WALTER BENTLEY

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My name is not important, just that I'm a sinner saved by grace and mercy. My story has been echoed across time and continents, but I feel compelled to share it and tell about what God has done for me.

I came from a broken and dysfunctional home. My usually single mom did the best she could for me, I believe, and I love her dearly. I grew up as an only child for the most part or as an outcast living with family who loved me completely even though I felt awkward and out of place. Luckily for me, I was always with family and never subjected to the juvenile care system. My daughters would not be so lucky, but that will come later in this tale.

I felt abandoned and an outcast. All my childhood and young adult years would be plagued by an unquenchable desire to find love and a connection to others, while I was plagued with and crushed by fear of rejection. This bipolar way of being has taken years of true unwavering love in others to get out of.

Needless to say, I was shy as a kid and had very few friends. I can only remember two occasions in which I had a sleep-over at a friend's house and no one ever came to our house. For whatever reason it seemed most kids either made fun of me or just avoided me until 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade. By 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was already getting in trouble in the areas of smoking, drugs, alcohol, and sexual activity. I was suddenly accepted by the girls and the fellas. I had morphed into a chameleon, getting good grades, playing sports, and doing the "Bad Boy" things. I wasn't long before "Sex, Drugs, and Rock-n'-Roll" ruled my life. By 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was a runaway, living on the streets in Central Oregon and headed to California. The next 4 or 5 years went pretty much like junior high, fast and free; Satan had many strongholds in my life and I was really headed nowhere good.

In 1994-'95 my life took dramatic turn - I became a father. Yes, after all that time, God decided to give me responsibility. I finally felt complete and total love at the birth of my baby girl and vowed to be the best father. 14 ½ months later my second little princess was born. It was too much for either of us and by 1998 I was fighting my addictions again.

I was single and fighting to keep my children as Child Protective Services had taken the girls from my now ex-fiancé. All I could think was *I had done exactly what my father did*. See, he left for the war in '71-'72 and never returned home to me.

I had failed my daughters.

Well, that snapped me out of my sick depravity and I looked to family for help. I got a good job in the Seattle area, went to court, and weekly visits with my daughters in Eugene, OR. About 6 to 8 months later I was reunited with my baby girls and was awarded full custody shortly after my little family was united we moved into our own place and I was raising two beautiful and precious "daddy's-girls" as a single father.

Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of my past, I buried myself in my job and my girls. Needless to say, we were a loving family, but still broken. Without the love of God in our daily lives, though, Satan's strongholds were still ever-present.

Once again the stress and isolation of single-parenthood wore me down and in just three years I was in trouble with drugs and women again. I was serving my self-will rather than God's in all things.

And so comes my next fall. I was about to lose everything I had worked so hard for. My daughters had to move in with my family in Central Washington. About a week later, with the help of my family, I was packing up all our possessions and following them.

Although I sought help and tried to move on with our lives, the sad truth is I abandoned them dozens of times over the following 20 years, always for the sin of this world, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. At the same time, I was plagued and haunted by my past, running from the pain I felt myself and, even worse, the painful memories that I had inflicted on my loved ones.

As to my daughters, I actually convinced myself that I was doing the right thing while leaving my girls with family, but in my heart I was devastated by not being with them.

In 2009, while serving a prison sentence, I was reintroduced to Jesus Christ and the healing power of God's grace and mercy. Over the next few months, after being baptized, I felt a connectedness and freedom to be something more than ever before. As I slowly realized I was changing and began to rebuild my life, tragedy struck.

In January of 2010, on a Thursday, before my scheduled release on that coming Monday, I received a private call from the chaplain of Harborview Medical Center. My first thought was my stepdad was dying, but in fact it was my mother who would not make it through the night. She was on life support Friday until I saw her Monday morning. As fate would have it I was only given an hour or so to say my goodbyes, because, you see, I was required by the Department of Corrections to check-in with my Community Corrections Officer within 24 hours of my release - yet another consequence of my sinful and criminal behaviors.

My emotional roadblocks began to tear me away from my relationship with God. I think over the next year I actually became angry with God for taking my mom, then my sweet grandmother, and my grandma "nanna". Once again I became lost in depression. Grief and loss were feelings and moods that debilitated my life, leaving me spiritually and emotionally numb.

If it hadn't been for the blessing of people God had been systematically placing in my life, especially my family and my extended family at the church I attended after prison, I would have most assuredly committed suicide. Instead, I made it through the next few years because "they loved me until I could love myself", to coin a phrase. They, altogether, were my saving grace. Killing myself and leaving my daughters was not possible, but I didn't know how to live, either.

Eventually, after finding God in those around me, I decided to rededicate myself to God and was re-baptized at my church as a show of that commitment.

I haven't been perfect since my re-dedication, and I won't be perfect until I walk with Christ in heaven. I have, however, grown in knowledge and strength over the years. I am currently serving another prison sentence. Today, however, I have the love of Christ in my life. I'm currently taking a course in discipleship training and looking at attending correspondence seminary school courses. I host a nightly bible study in my cell and can be found most days reading my bible for hours.

I no longer need someone to complete me and am able to completely love my family and friends. I'm working on rebuilding my relationships with my daughters, even though one of them chooses not to communicate with me.

I know now that unless I stay focused on Christ, bearing the burden of my cross and dying daily, it is as impossible as a camel passing through the eye of a needle to break the bonds of sin in my life.

God is rebuilding me from the inside out and I'm learning daily what it means to be a child of God. It is very difficult to not fall into the old sin-nature and become prey for the schemes of the devil, but I know in my soul that it is going to be worth every second of discomfort and pain to stand before Christ Jesus and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."