



Update



November 2018

Vernon & Martha Hedge

Still Serving the Lord

In 2014, I shared the testimony of Jeffery. I wanted to revisit and see how he is doing four years later. I called him and can share with you that he's doing great! So that you can more fully appreciate the work God has done in his life, let me refresh your memory of the original testimony.

At age seven, Jeffery's athletic abilities were already showing. All through grade school he enjoyed playing little league baseball and practicing with his dad who was the coach. At age 11, his little sister was born, and it seemed that all the attention turned to her. Jeffery felt like a non-entity.

His father coached a slow pitch softball team during Jeffery's Junior High and High School years and won four championships, but never gave Jeffery a chance to play on his team. Jeffery said, *I was good enough to play on first string high school, but not good enough to play on his team.* To this day he doesn't know why his father worked with him in little league but changed after his sister was born.

Although he attended church regularly for eight years in the west Texas town where he was born, when his father's attitude changed, Jeffery's attitude changed. Because of the attention shift he said, *I felt unloved, I felt rejected, and I started looking for love in all the wrong places with the wrong kind of people because **they accepted me.** I was hanging out in the wrong part of town with the wrong kind of people, making the wrong kind of*

decisions.

When Jeffery finished high school, he was wounded, confused, and in bitterness said, *I guess I'm just not good enough to play on his [slow pitch] team!* But he played well enough to get a baseball scholarship at San Angelo State University, even though he was doing drugs along the way.

The first semester went well, but when spring baseball practice started, he didn't pass the drug test, and his scholarship was revoked. When he returned home his parents were sorely disappointed and totally out of touch with his needs. They stonewalled him, driving the rejection even deeper.

Then a violent split happened between him and his mother over the \$500 that he had given her to hold in reserve to pay for his car insurance. One day when he was out of money, he wanted the \$500, she refused, but he took it anyway. She was so angry that she took a broom and knocked all his sports trophies off the shelf, smashed them, and told him to get out of the house and never come back!

More deeply wounded than

before, he increased his drug use to hide the pain and created an expensive habit. Needing money, he turned to crime. When he was 23, he robbed a convenience store and was shot three times by police. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to 65 years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

He spent 21 years in the Coffield unit near Palestine. One night in the 20th year he had a dream. In it the Lord appeared and said, *"If you ever expect to get out of prison, you are going to give your life to me."* I didn't know what that meant. I was living for the Devil in the prison and I didn't want anything to do with Jesus. Because I was so bitter, I didn't want to hear anything about Jesus.

But God was at work. The next week some inmate friends gave him a study Bible. Later he got down on his knees and prayed, *God if you are real, I need to know you. I need you to change my heart. I need you to change my ways.* He randomly opened the Bible to Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and read where it said to never make a vow unless you can repay. He said, *Lord if you will get me out of prison, I'll never turn my back on you.* But he was impatient and struggled, and wanted things right now. He didn't follow through.

One Wednesday night, friends told him that a special group was coming from Calvary Commission and they wanted him to go. He went, and Cynthia (who was in my classes) gave her testimony that

(Continued from page 1)

night of 16 years of drugs, prostitution, and whatever presented itself to her. Then Bill Hayes preached on the fear of the Lord and how it was the beginning of knowledge and wisdom.

Because of the love he felt in that service, he said, *I knew I wanted to go to Calvary Commission. So, I started the application process, but one of the questions was do you attend church regularly and are you working in the church.* The Coffield Unit has regular church services on Sundays with a full-time chaplain who serves as a pastor. Jeffery told the truth, *No, I don't attend church and I'm not saved. I don't know Jesus.*

At Calvary Commission, because he wasn't saved would normally have stopped the application process. Several friends at the prison sent recommendations for him. The application committee prayed, but they couldn't find peace to say no. Jeffery's application was accepted, and in January of 2010 he was released and arrived on the campus of Calvary Commission.

The first two weeks Jeffery said were like a honeymoon because the love of God was everywhere. As the new wore off, he began to receive admonitions and challenges from other men who were students in the Bible School. He began to realize that he didn't have what the other students had so he went to his dorm pastor and said, *I want what you guys have!* Jeffery prayed to receive Christ, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to grow, sharing his testimony wherever the door opened.

Jeffery's father had passed away while he was in prison, and as time passed, Jeffery longed to see his mother and sister. He made efforts

to contact his mother, but she would not respond. Every effort to reconcile failed. After four years on campus, he finally gave up.

On a Calvary Commission mission trip to Mexico, surprise of surprises, he met a couple he had gone to school with in his home town. Jeffery shared his heart with them. When they returned home, they went to see Jeffery's mother several times. They told her about Calvary Commission and the change that had happened in Jeffery. They persuaded her to agree to see him and arranged a time. Jeffery was rejoicing.

Standing at her front door, he didn't know what her response would be. He anxiously knocked, and when she opened the door, she just stood and stared. She hadn't seen him for 25 years. She looked again and said, *Jeffery, is that you?* He said, *Yes, Mama it's me.*

He said, *That first look into her eyes told me that she was receiving me as her son who had come home. At first, she just stood as the realization of what was happening sank in. After a minute or two she began to cry and hugged and held on tight. It seemed like in that moment God melted away all the things she had built up in her heart against me.*

Mom called his little sister and said, *Terri, we have company, Jeffery is home.* Within 15 minutes Terri came



E-Newsletter

Would you rather receive our letter by email? Send an email to vlhedge@att.net with your name and email address and we will be glad to make that change for you. Thanks!

rushing through the front door and almost knocked Jeffery down. It was Terri's birthday, and as she hugged and cried, said, *This is the best birthday gift I could ever receive.*

The next day he went around town visiting his old football teammates, other friends, and visited an auto parts store that one of his classmates owned. When the owner saw Jeffery, he hugged him, talked a little, and said with excitement, *Wait a minute, let me make a phone call.*

Within 30 minutes three State Highway Patrol cars pulled into the parking lot. The officers were former classmates and ex-football teammates. They hugged Jeffery and were so glad to see him.

Jeffery said, *It didn't matter what I had done in the past, it was what they saw in me right then and they could reunite.*

They said, *Jeffery we have a 30-year class reunion coming up this summer and we want you to be a part of it.*

A year or two later, his mother went to be with the Lord. It will always be special to him that reconciliation took place before her passing.

Now for an update: Jeffery works a regular job at Kid's Kitchen, cooking for public school programs. He owns a Yard Care business, taking care of the property of 15 customers, and he is the Caretaker of the Church of the Living Hope property in Tyler, TX. He has been a part of 18 different mission trips into Mexico and three mission trips into Belize.

Each week I teach many students who are "works of God's grace," who have turned their lives around. What a privilege!

Thank you for your support in finances and prayer. ✨
