



Update

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He Tried to Fit—But Couldn't

Many of the students at the Calvary Bible Institute are older than the age we think of as students. James is in his 50s and was in my first-year class last fall. He was always a delight to talk with. However, the joy I see in him now has not always been there.

He was born in an upper middleclass family in San Antonio, Texas. Although his older brother didn't know it, James idolized him from an early age. He wanted to be just like him. His older brother was an over-achiever in athletics and other pursuits, James thought he was smarter than he was and felt inferior to his brother.

There were reasons he could not achieve. James had extreme learning disabilities, was excessively hyper, had poor eyesight, and as a child was placed on high doses of tranquilizers. He knew his parents loved him, but they didn't always know how to help him. By the time he reached high school, he had some close friends and tried his best to become athletic in football. When he had conflict with the coaching staff, he quit.

In some respects, his homelife was good, but he had conflict with his dad. Dad was an avid Church of Christ member and his mother was an Episcopalian. Consequently, the division between them left the children with little church attendance except for holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

With no knowledge of spiritual matters, James couldn't comprehend what was going on with his parents and church. He was also in conflict with his older brother because of his brother's abilities and his own disabilities, but James still looked up to him. As he grew older, the net result of his relationships was he felt rejected by family and society.

There were Christian neighbors who invited James to attend church with them and at one of the services he received Christ as Savior. He said, *For the first time in my life I felt alive! I knew I had a calling on my life to the ministry, but when I reached out to my pastor about my calling, he rejected me, and his language to me was belittling which reaffirmed my life of rejection. I felt inadequate, dumb, and no good. I felt like I wasn't good enough and this was the last straw. I felt like I would never be accepted. I expected this pastor to be different. He never even sat down with me to discuss it. He just told me to come back in a couple of years if I felt the same way, turned and walked out of my life.* James never went back to that church because of the shame he

felt of never being good enough.

When James was 16 his parent moved to Virginia. With a new location and new people he had high hopes that he could make a new start there, but alas he never felt accepted there either. At age 17 both his parents signed permission forms for James to join the Marine Corps. He passed the written exam but was rejected because of his eyesight.

This felt like it was the end; I had nothing to offer and nothing to gain. So, I packed a backpack, let my hair grow, and left for California, the land of peace and love, so I thought. What a fool I was. It was crazy, unimaginable, and after living there for over a year, I was exposed to any and all types of lifestyles. You can imagine how disappointing that was, so I left and returned to San Antonio in hopes of a new start once more.

When he arrived in San Antonio James was willing to do just about anything to be accepted. This led to a life of drugs, odd jobs, and loneliness. He became fully involved with the drug scene and turned into a workaholic. He was involved with several illegal business ventures and tried to convince himself that he had it made. But down deep he knew the people he was involved with were the wrong kind of people, but he couldn't break loose because he saw nothing else that had anything to offer him.

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Then everything changed. He was taking drugs and drinking late one night with a fair-weather friend. They went to a location where after some arguments back and forth, a full level altercation developed. It ended up in James shooting and killing a man.

In July 1991, James was arrested, tried, and given a life sentence in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. He sat wounded, confused, and angry and believed his life would end by dying in prison.

He spent the first three and a half years in administrative segregation, locked in his cell alone 23 hours a day. Out from under the influence of drugs and alcohol, things about life began to settle in. He started feeling the presence of the Lord again, and it came strong. He again knew God was calling him, and he became aware that the Lord had never left him; even in it all God had always been there.

Out of segregation and some time after being released into the general population in prison, I once again started on an upward climb, seeking and praising the Lord. In those early days in the prison

chapel in the East Town prison farm, I finally began serving my Savior with all my heart. Finding true Joy and peace for what seemed like the first time in my life, I served the Lord with full heart surrender for the rest of my incarceration.

James learned about and made application to Calvary Commission and was accepted in 2005, but now the task was to secure a parole out of prison. In 2007 the first parole was denied, and it would take five more attempts before he would be paroled in 2017.

However, shortly before my release, God had granted me the reconciliation of my two younger brothers whom I hadn't seen or even spoken to in almost 40 years. When I returned to Christ, I had requested from the Lord that He allow me to sit down with them and pray with them. It happened, and it was the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced only second to my rebirth through Christ. After this meeting, it was only a matter of weeks before my release. After being in prison for 27 years, on February 21, 2017 I was released.

Words couldn't describe the excitement in his heart when James rode through the gates of Calvary Commission, enrolled in the

Calvary Bible Institute, and started his studies and missions training for the ministry God has for him.

Since arriving at Calvary Commission, I have been out of the country to Mexico to a children's orphanage and returned for a second time in December in 2018. Also, I have been allowed to travel across the United States to spend time with my mentor for his 90th birthday, who stood by me in prison for seven and half years and encouraged me in my walk with Christ.

I was also able to spend Thanksgiving this year with my youngest brother and his family in Dallas, Texas. The first meal we have had together in over 50 years and I was asked to bless the meal. Only through the Lord Jesus Christ could this have ever been possible.

He is my Lord and Savior and I will always serve Him until the day I stand in front of Him, fall to my knees, and praise and worship Him. God Bless you all and remember that I love you, but Jesus Christ loves you more.

What a monument of grace. God is so good to follow someone through all kinds of sin and deprivation. For James, the Lord was just waiting for the moment of full surrender. Praise God! ✨

Prayer Request

Years ago, I taught a series of lessons on *Understanding Spiritual Authority*. I will be teaching this course during the Spring semester, starting Jan. 9. I have worked all through the Christmas holidays on updating my notes and adding additional insights. There has been an unusual amount of spiritual warfare while working on the notes. At times I had to pray just

to stay at the computer. In other research the opposite was true, it was hard to stop writing and I stayed too long at the computer.

This series will be life-changing for the students which is probably the reason there is such warfare. Please pray for spiritual strength and might that I can teach each lesson in the power and liberty of the Holy Spirit. Most Christians have some "rebellion pockets" in their lives and the students will be no different. Pray for a work of

the Holy Spirit to set the students free from anything that hinders their walk with the Lord.

Financial statements will be mailed soon. If you don't receive yours by January 31 or you have a question, please contact us.

Thank you so much for your faithful financial support. If you can't support in finances, please pray. Changed lives depend on your prayers for me and the students. Thanks for praying! ✨
