

Interview With Ron Driver

Well, but how about those coincidences a couple of years a couple weeks ago running into you after 17 years Uh on Thursday night when Thursday nights are usually You're with your prison ministry. Yep, You just happen to be there Yeah, and we sat down and talked about sharing a little bit and you were interested in and being involved in this. Uh Be prepared to save a life campaign.

Absolutely. So Uh, and then to top it off Just this last Thursday, I show up to give my testimony and it's another Thursday, but you're back Yep And you end up introducing me. There are no mistakes when god's concerned.

Yeah, and then it turned out the next night You were going to be giving your testimony to the church and I went and uh Had a good time learned a little bit more You know about what you went through during the pandemic and everything Uh When we're starting off just give a brief, um overview of kind of what your childhood was like what you went through uh how you got on the wrong side of drugs and the law and and um To be honest, I I always felt less than um All the other kids dads could see could play with them I loved my father I was very Codependent and very protective of my father I was a child around the house and tried to take care of him as much as I could which Wasn't good because I came I became codependent at a very young age taking care of my father and um I had a speech impairment Life was what I knew it But as I grew up and started looking around at my friends, I realized that my life was totally different from theirs and uh, then So I guess you say I always felt less than Uh less than what i'm not sure but I always felt an emptiness uh in me too Um now through those through my childhood i've got some happy memories um Got a lot of sad I was sexually sexually molested twice between the ages of six and eight years old um by some older neighbors Um there again that just continued adding to the fact that I felt less than Uh, I couldn't talk to my family about it because I guess To be honest, I felt kind of like an afterthought when they're concerned. Um everything seemed to Everything seemed to be better if I was out of the way So therefore I stayed out of the way. I'd say I'd get up in the morning I'd go outside and I'd play I wouldn't come home until the street lights came on Sometimes when i've been okay, but uh, yeah, okay.

Um Well, I was born in the projects of western atlanta and um to a family that seemed normal But as I grew up I could see just how dysfunctional our whole life was. Uh, my father was blind Uh, he was overweight. He had diabetes.

He had heart issues um He ended up passing when I was 11 years old A lot of the kids used to make fun of him that used to aggravate me um as I said earlier, um from a young age, I always felt less than and not necessarily just because we didn't have some of the nicer things that the other kids had just because I feel different. Uh, I felt like there was something missing Uh in my in my life in my heart my soul um I love you was a common word in our household but in words only And that became you know evident as the the older we got uh on the baby Of uh, three kids. I have two older sisters.

There's four years apart. Oh between all three of us um Like I said, my father passed away when I was 11 years old And um Just a couple weeks before my 12th birthday and I got high I smoked some marijuana In fact, it was the day over the day after my 12th birthday, I don't

remember but I remember feeling relaxed for the first time Well the first time really I could remember going back and thinking about it I don't remember a time that felt that relaxed and I realized That I could get that feeling to escape any trauma any hurt Anything in my life anytime I wanted not thinking about the negative sex that the the drug or the alcohol Was doing to me and my brain and the addictive Mentality of it back then they didn't teach Drug addiction school like they do today. We wasn't as aware of it so uh my drug use um Started I got high that first day went back the second day Uh before long I was doing quaaludes.

I was doing acid. I was doing um Plastic deals. I mean whatever I could get my hands on I was I basically became a garbage distillation for For drugs just because I didn't want to feel um Depression As an adult I ought to say I didn't become depressed until a few years back During the pandemic but looking back on my all my life.

I was a very depressed child growing up and That had you know that had an effect on uh on everything and after my father died I remember I shared this with you on my in my in my inventory. I mean my image or my testimony but when my father died I was lost I didn't know what to do at that point Suicide wasn't really talked about that much. I didn't think about taking my life, but I just wasn't happy living Uh, I would leave in the morning I would get up at school time I would get dressed I would go To the hospital there in East Point, Georgia where my father passed away at And I would just sit in the waiting room Okay And I don't know why Other than the fact that that was the last place I saw real life And I felt a piece of conviction I had two of them And And the hospital was still open today.

I still kind of feel that when I go uh, I haven't been there in years, but I did have to take my knees there for some outpatient surgery and um um All those feelings, uh, all those feelings came back um When my dad died I guess you could basically say I'm all school parents at the same time because my mother uh As a child, I didn't see it but now as an adult I can look back in her life My mother was a very depressed woman um she uh She sank into the deepest state of depression that I'd ever seen anyone in after my dad died And it wasn't a short State she was there for a number of years At 12 years old By this time my oldest sister had already married get out of the house my sister that was just four years older than I Couldn't control me didn't even attempt to control me So basically at 12 13 years old I was coming going as I played some nights. I would come home Midnight sometimes so I wouldn't come home to the sun was coming up um school It was take it or leave it. Um I quit school the first time in the eighth grade And later decided I wanted to go back went back for another year or so, but ended up I did end up quitting and I got my ged the year later Praise god, I was able to do the bible college too.

So i'm not completely stupid But uh, it's amazing how Depression and just the darkness that looms over us Will keep us from growing in so many aspects including education And just social living and and that's what that's what I had began doing. I began with drawing myself from my friends from training my family um Everybody looked at me knew I was different. Um I mean I had long hair.

Um None of my family members did they were all you know church-going christians and Nothing wrong with that But at the time I just really wanted no part of it but um I don't remember a single person Ever Confronting me and asking me how you doing from the time my father died until January of 2021 we're in I started contemplating suicide on the jumping

forward um my mother Eventually got her life right with the lord Started attending counseling started going to church. Um, she wanted everything To be perfect and at that time I was a full-blown drug addict. Um In my mind there was no going back for me I loved my mother.

I lived with my mother. I was protective of my mother But I did not want to obey my mother thinking back I think I kind of didn't have the right respect I had for her because of What she allowed to happen to me But Praise god. She lived to be 91.

We worked all that out before she passed away So my dad died before I became a drug addict before I ever used the same thing And my mom got to see me clean this over before she passed but um you know jumping forward I took all kinds of coping mechanisms all Throughout my life. Uh, I had a habit of fleeing. I I've always not today but I used to hate confrontation If I knew I was gonna have a confrontation with you I'll be around as fast as I could the other direction just because I just I just didn't learn well, I I think uh, one of the key words there is I I Uh, i'm just sharing, you know, well first of all you talk about A lot of I love you was spoken this words words and but but empty and not backed up maybe by actions well in my case, um uh My I my father spent his last six weeks in my home But what happened was that when I retired in my 50s, I started spending a lot of time with him and uh One of the key words is escape, you know in recovery we talk about denials the foundation getting over denial And denial is not just a river in in egypt, right? but I would say uh more important really is the fact that uh, we're all about escaping pain and hopelessness, whatever And and we have different mechanisms to do that.

Now my father when I was little I didn't feel loved he was emotionally distant Because his escape mechanism was being a workaholic And I inherited that So not only was I a workaholic but I always Had a job that required a lot of travel So I was away and and it just really didn't bother me spending months in a hotel. I basically was always a loner uh, but uh, that was his method of escape that became mine and then Later in life, I kind of realized and and wrote a long letter asking my four children for forgiveness I think two of them did but um, I wanted it to stop You know with their generation and them not to pass it on to their kids, right? Right, but um, I I guess um Escape is is a key word. I think in this this whole theme, especially with the suicide Uh, you know, uh when when the hopelessness And the pain gets so great that you don't see another solution.

I think that's when people start thinking of turning to suicide even though they don't really want to die and they just Don't see another Another solution. I don't think no one wants to die, but you're right. They just don't see a way out They just they think they just all come I remember That i've been married and divorced three or four times so Everybody says i'm a nice guy, but evidently there's something there maybe i'm just so headstrong and i'm hard to get along with but um God has taught me a lot.

Uh throughout my throughout my life. I'm 63 now and Thank god. I am teachable.

But uh um You know I can think back Through all three of my separations. So my last separation was very Very tough Because we got married late in life And I had the type of love for this woman That I didn't think I would ever have for anyone And we possibly could have made it But problems had to occur in the life of our kids and we had to have kids move

in the house with us and It just didn't work things got things went from bad to worse and we finally called her quits So that was trying uh, but my first two divorces It was like okay, it's it's it's over. It's too long, you know, turn the page But this this particular and we were married in 2010, I believe we separated in 2019 and very still still married separated but married the very next Less than a year covid hits the pandemic I'm living.

I i'm sharing an apartment with a friend of mine And he's a nice guy a good friend, but he's an alcoholic And after you know after five o'clock he starts popping the bottles and he would get drunk every night I've never been a big drinker. Now. I will drink but I just I'm not a big drinker And uh, so I spend a lot of time in my room That's isolation and uh Then the temp the pandemic pandemic hit About two weeks later They laid off two-thirds of our workforce at the logistics company.

I'm working with and That weekend just three days later my car broke So I didn't know where to get to meetings. I had no nothing. So Even though a relapse when you're when you're Recovering from drug addiction the relapse mode starts long before you pick that drug up I mean it's in here and it's in here And if you don't talk about it, if you don't Share with others then You're bound to pick the drug up again and after being Clean and sober for 16 years I started using heroin again I thank god it didn't last long Um, I used to Shoot it To the needle.

I did not do that this time. All I did was snorted I was Something about me just didn't want to go that far But still I wanted to kill the pain inside because that's so much pain And not just pain I had so I had so many unanswered questions the pandemic went job. What am I gonna do? What am I gonna live? I didn't know what to talk to Churches were closed I tried a couple online zoom meetings I hate zone if I never get on a zoom meeting again That's too slow So I suffered probably And I Remember one it started raining one friday evening the rain dog friday evening And I remember that saturday I was sitting in the garage With the garage door open watching the right And never in my life that I ever Heard voices in my head and they weren't horrible.

It's like I was talking to myself But the voices were so clear Here I am i'm i'm an ordained minister I had my own men's home open for years Where I helped other men I've done jail ministry this coming up. November will be 13 years I had people that I meet Every day of my life saying hey, I remember you you helped me through something I couldn't think of any of that then None of those things would come to mind all that all that would come to mind was look where you're at Hopelessness god doesn't love you If god loves you, you wouldn't be killed. You wouldn't be going through this Hopelessness exactly like you said hopelessness fear great fear Abandonment um It I honestly I had five kids I have Reconciled with all my children except for my daughter We talked today, but she lived so far away.

We don't see much of each other So i'm just grateful to be able to talk with her um But I felt abandoned and Even though I had no plans of How to take my life in my head I was hearing you can't get through this It's not worth it again, you don't have this look at your age Look where you've been look what you've done. Look at the people you've helped but look where you're at death I was scared I don't think i've ever been that scared by the lights. I had a moment of clarity Why I died of a suicide I thought I never thought I would ever do that a day in my life They were kind They were professional They gave me suggestions Um, they

recommended me call a family member if I could think of one and they stayed on hold Well, I called that family member And I called my niece who I live with now.

She's divorced we're just Doing life together and you know enjoying life and um Of course, she got in the car. She was on her way over to to to see me to make sure I went to The facility that suicide prevention was directing me to go to You know and today I had people tell me Uh, you were just depressed. You weren't gonna hurt yourself.

You would never pick that phone up I would like to think that's the case But it's probably not but it's probably not I think if I had to pick that phone up I think I've been done something and I would pick everything and Here I am On June 21st Is my new clean day. I just celebrated three years And granted it's not It's not the 20 years that I should have But i'm here i'm here And god's using me. Yep since since all this I have custody of my grandson.

He's going through some things. I'm able to help him. Um Um Back in the joke industry.

We were out for a couple years. That's not That's the grandson that was with you at the uh, the years in my test. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes Yeah, he's even here the day outside.

He's in the shooting basketball as a matter of fact um But I know they don't remember that i'm trying to get into. Um a detox but um You know if If the bible is clear that satan Doesn't want us healthy happy His reason is to still kill and destroy He wanted to steal all my happiness all my joy He wanted to see me gone. He wanted to take me out Because he knew the people That eventually if I ever got helped again that I could help So I had to take some time and this this was the hardest part for me mark is getting honest about it Because even though the relapse mode started long before I picked up the drug I faked it I would come to my meetings I'd have that mask on I'd have that smile Now the real people that knew me well They knew I was going third I believe you met steven the other day steven was such a good friend steven knew everything going on in my life Never once judged me never once uh Called me out Just continued to tell me he loved me the supporters Absolutely, and you felt safe sharing with him.

Absolutely. Yeah after a while not at first But it took him Confronting me about it for me to open up to him Well, one of the one of the most important things which you just shared uh Lou and my campaign Is really aimed at trying to get the most exposure to people that don't think they need to learn about uh being prepared to address Somebody who's got suicidal thoughts but in every message in every poster, uh, i'm trying to include the fact that Suicide is never it's a solution and and if you don't have somebody, uh to talk to that you feel safe sharing with Use the suicide prevention hotline. They're there 24 7. It's free.

I'm so thankful And and they basically saved your life. Yes. Yeah Yeah, if I got a busy tone or they put me on hold which i'm sure they don't do that But if that had to happen I I'm sure I would be here today.

I'm sure and you know, we We as society Um Had got to start paying attention to the ones around us Um We're so hooked on This person is different for me. I gotta stay up stay away

No trying to get to the other person You know, no, we can't be friends with everybody. We have to there's different different opinions different things.

Uh, politics plays a big part of that but We've got to be aware, you know what you're doing, yes what you're doing to raise your awareness we don't How do you talk to someone? You know, how do you ask someone if they're suicidal without asking them if they're suicidal? Because that's an offensive question Even if you are suicidal to me, that's an offensive question sometimes though the best thing is to just uh Ask the question. Uh, yeah And you know lou and I had that discussion. Uh, i'll share uh, the video where any of you when you hear uh today, but um One of the things that I had brought up when we were talking was, you know, well, you know Are you are you thinking of harboring yourself and he he made it very clear, you know Harming yourself and taking your life for two different things and it's better to just ask the direct question so so that was everything but um You know one of the things you heard my testimony one of the things i'm all about is the value Uh, and the improvement to mental and physical health you get through humor Even when we're talking about something this serious and uh When you gave your testimony you were talking about The third failed marriage.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah Your comment was Gee, I guess I was the common denominator.

Yeah. Yeah. I know everybody's thinking i'll become the nominator Let me let me let me ask you.

Are you familiar with the tv series from years back called justified? It was a u.s marshall is kind of like a vaguely it's kind of like a redneck deliverance version of dirty harry. Yeah Well, my favorite quote, uh I'll suavacize it a little bit. That's my spanglish word for Uh trying to uh be a little bit less offensive when i'm talking to an american compared to the humor and stuff I've experienced in spain but uh, he had this one quote he's with a a prisoner and uh, he says to the prisoner he says hey, um You know everybody every day runs into every now and then an a-hole But the funny thing about it is if you run into a-holes all day long just maybe you're the a-hole I like that.

Yeah, that's true. And so, uh, you know, I kind of have this theory i'm trying i'm working on a book Uh all the things I wish I'd been taught back in junior high school That kind of helped me get my life in order in my 60s but uh Uh, i've got this theory of basically a ladder of levels of a-hole ones yeah, and uh Uh, you know, I I thought there's those two levels he defined Then the third level is where you kind of make a competition out of it And the best example of that which has gotten really serious here in the last few years where people point out baseball bats and pistols But I would say road rage Where you know, it's kind of like well who could be the bigger one? but uh i've also um uh made Errors and done things maybe even my wife said well, that's not a good idea and did it anyway And and and decided I had defined a a higher level and had reached that fourth or fifth run. Yeah but um One of the things i've noticed is man you just uh It swings a lot of what you said.

We got to learn how to forgive ourselves That was my biggest That was my biggest thing To overcome and to do was to forgive myself from everything From my feelings toward my parents as a child because regardless How they raised me They were probably raised worse and went through their own struggles and I wasn't I wasn't an easy race. Trust me If if you

said no I wanted to know why and then I would have not done it anyway, but but um You know, I had to forgive Myself for my feelings toward them. Um Uh, I had to forgive my My side to get forgive myself For even though I loved my father so very much I resented the fact that he was blind Never played catch with my dad My dad never got to see my face That he did my two sister On his blindness totally idiotic.

It was cataracts Could have been removed but his dad was so ignorant back then People were ignorant. They were just stupid. They were ignorant back then but um So, you know, I had a lot of things, you know to to To forgive myself for and looking back At all of them And I want to I want to say this to hope that it makes sense And tell me if it does that All my years of service and ministry Leading up to this relapse in 2021 Was heartfelt it was done for a good purpose But there was a lot of me Yeah, there's a lot of pride in it.

Yeah Maybe I wanted to prove that. Hey, I am something Because all my life I felt like I wasn't but since 2021 Since I fell flat on my face and god had The grace and the love to bring me through my service my ministry my testimony my everything It's done pure love and genuine Just generosity It's less of me And more of him. That's all I want What When you're sharing when you've shared here just now There were two other major thoughts that they came to my mind, but let me just share again about my father, you know It wasn't until my 50s after I retired and I started spending time with him that I actually he did love me And then he he realized I loved him and in my 50s was the first time we ever told each other.

I love you Uh, and then it wasn't until the last couple weeks I realized, uh, he all his life he had suffered Of course, they didn't have the term back then but he suffered ptsd from his time in world war ii And a lot of that came out just those last couple weeks but um the the two common themes I see Is uh, you know, we talk about we gotta forgive ourselves and you know, one of the one of the things I did a lot of Was beat myself up and and and I got to a point where I realized How dumb can you be? For me to talk to myself like that in a way That I would never talk to a friend or a family member, right? Just why am I doing that? But the the other main thing that comes up is you mentioned, uh, not feeling enough or sufficient empty Uh, and I relate that to some of what I was sharing in my testimony and that is kind of being overly concerned even maybe obsessed With wanting approval wanting people to like you and and worried about what other people are saying or thinking about you and being able to get past that which for me, I guess was the The biggest step towards finding self-confidence is even self-esteem. Would you? Agree with that. Absolutely.

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah now, you know Self-worth You know, we have we have to find our self-worth and it can't just be it can't just be in our work in our ministry Uh, it's got to be our beliefs.

It's got to be in our everyday life. It's got to be our attributes how we treat others Absolutely. Absolutely um You know i'm retired today i'm 63 I stay more busy day than I did my last 10 years working and um I I love it Uh, I I generally love it.

I love sharing I love sharing my pain with others Because there's so many people that's going through it and the recovery from that. Yes You know Well, you know you shared You found yourself Uh in a psychiatric hospital for a 72 hour period of observation Handcuffed to a girl. Well that that was that was in new york.

That was during my that was during my detox Okay. Yeah when I came I was homeless on the streets of new york shooting Shooting heroin. Uh at one point I had abscess on my arm right here is so big I mean, I I couldn't even close my arm but yeah, I uh Uh, I wanted to get clean and and someone directed me to bellevue hospital and I got there so late they said, uh Hey, you're gonna have to come back tomorrow and you need to get back a couple hours earlier You know there yeah, I was depressed at that point suicide never came into mind but to To heal the pain I would I could have done So much heroin trying to kill the pain that I killed myself, too and there's so many times that I did that that if I had been in a room unrolling I probably would have just fallen asleep could quit breathe die but thankfully every time that happened I was with someone but you know my uh My the outreach worker that sent me down there.

He did tell me I called him and says hey joe They're gonna turn me away man. What are you gonna do? I'm scared. I want to leave and he says are you serious? Yes, sir.

I'm serious He says tell him you're gonna um That you're afraid you're gonna hurt yourself or someone else you believe in that state So I did and sure enough my first 72 hours of my detox. I was handcuffed to a gurney In the hallway of the psych ward now, I don't know if you've ever had to detox off of heroin But you're throwing up and you're crapping at the same time so that was a messy 72 hours But it's all history now Well, you know i've had a couple stays in psychiatric hospitals, but uh, tell me if you'd agree I I would say anybody that's watched one flew over the cuckoo's nest uh Not counting the escapes. Yeah, uh a lot of that's what you really see Yes and the first time That I was taken to the psych hospital was after I had a nervous breakdown in spain And i'm with the psychiatrist.

We go up the elevator to the ward floor The elevator doors open and right there in front of us is this elderly woman in a wheelchair And she's screaming at the top of her lungs. Help me. Help me.

Help me, right? The psychiatrist the rest of the staff and the rest of the residents are all just ignoring her. That's holy cow Now the reason I tell you that is jump forward to my father He spent a month in and in bad shape in the hospital I brought him over to georgia to be closer to me in a rehab center One day I go to the rehab center and I walk I enter the hall And down at the far end of the hall is my dad in his wheelchair Stuck saying help me help me. Hell and nobody's paying any attention.

Nobody there That's when I brought him to my home, yeah, yeah paradise to that So for you anyway when the the key for you, uh, uh ending up staying alive when you were suicidal Was the suicide prevention hotline? Yes, they directed me to to pine woods um when I got to pine woods, um uh, they Of course did drugs drug spree, you know, I had a mixture of uh, different drugs in me, uh, mostly heroin um They wanted to turn me away this because I back years ago. I was in a severe auto accident where I was taking opiates for 20 years I took a time release morphine And I didn't abuse it Because me and I wouldn't abuse it. I'll just use something else but um because of my past They thought that maybe they wouldn't be suitable for grandma and they were like Let's send you Over here someplace in decatur.

They can detox you through methadone Well, i'm aware of methadone I won't know part of methadone i'm like no i'll go turkey I won't be any problem. Just Just just please admit me

so they did and Bring said I was a mother a mother patient. Uh, uh, I really wanted to get my life in order, but just Through the despair the hopelessness, I didn't see how and through the daily classes that we went through there And god god is so good about putting the right people At the right place at the right time There was this there was this um Counselor there I bumped into her at a christian concert Uh Several months later.

We had a good conversation Then I saw her at community on freedom fest the last one they had but I haven't seen her yet I'd love to see her again, but she Just helped me So much and she just didn't help me with her book knowledge She went above and beyond what? Her profession taught her and she prayed with me and That's what was what I needed. I was a christian. I was a christian That satan wanted to defeat and wanted to kill So I couldn't rise back up and do anything positive And he almost succeeded So I spent seven days at belgian hospital Went in the day before my birthday when june 20th My birthday was june 21st and um I came out Uh unsure But came out with a different uh a different aspect on own life and um Made some changes moved out of the apartment with my roommate and moved in with family and Things have just gotten better every day.

No, everything's perfect. No uh i've had i've had Two neck surgeries my whole neck is fused. It's fused.

I've had three lower back surgery I have a spinal cord stimulator in my right hip to help me manage my sciatic nerve pain uh I live daily in pain but For just over three years now. I haven't taken an opiate yet Another day may come that I have to again doesn't mean I have to abuse it Right, right. But what I have to do is I have to be honest With my support group.

Hey, i'm going through this You know help me be accountable See, I learned so much through my relapse Even though it almost took me out from suicide I learned so much and now I have The greatest thing that i've learned through it all is how to be genuine with my lord and savior I'm, not gonna say for all those years. I went through the motions but they're just I loved helping people. I loved it when I had my midterm open Like I said earlier, there's just too much me well Would you agree with me? The more real and the more authentic you can be not just with others but with yourself, right The better everything else go.

Oh, absolutely. So It's all right. Oh, yeah.

Yeah, i'm five minutes late for my meeting So anyway, thanks for sharing. Uh, maybe we'll get together again Anytime mark. I want to help you with this any way I can