

Our Father's Persistent Love

“. . . and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” (Philemon 1:9)

My name is Philip, I am in my 60's now and I served a 30-year sentence in Trenton State Prison/Rahway State Prison. I was born in Pittsburgh, PA and grew up there until I was about 12 years old. My family was not very “church going” although my parents did bring us to the Catholic Church some Sundays, and I was sent to Sunday School. I have very few memories of that time, but I do remember being afraid of church and the Fathers. I remember much of the law and little grace.

I had two sisters, one 2 years older than me and the other seven years younger. My father wasn't home much because he worked alot, but he loved us and took care of us. We didn't have much money, but we were comfortable. My mom was very loving and involved in all that we did. At the age of 12 we moved to New Jersey. The first friend that I had (really the first boys I met) got high on pot and alcohol. I wanted to be accepted and have friends, so I began to drink and “drug”. It started out mostly on weekends, but through my Ocean Township High School years it progressed to daily use. I began to experiment and use frequently every type of drug imaginable. I won't waste the paper naming them all. We would drink vodka and orange juice in the morning before school and smoke tons of joints and do anything else we could get our hands on. We were “garbage heads”, meaning we did anything and everything to get high - L.S.D., cocaine, uppers and downers, speed, mushrooms...you name it!

I see clearly now that drugs and booze were my hiding place. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they sinned against God causing guilt, which lead them to make fig leaf clothing in a futile attempt to cover that guilt. It didn't work. When God came, they hid. They were ashamed and they were guilty. When we look at our lives in view of the Ten Commandments, “thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet (Ex 20) “etc. God's word says “we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death”. So we as men and women who have sinned and are guilty before God, do the same as Adam and Eve, only our “fig leaves” are drugs and alcohol, money, fast cars, maybe sex. But whatever your fig leaf is, you have one, and you are really using it to hide from God. It does not work. It will not remove your guilt. God's justice demands our death. God's love demands our life, in Christ, both demands are met. God's word says, “but by His own blood he entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Hebrews 9:12) because God's word says, “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

When I was in 12th grade in “high” school the state of New Jersey changed the drinking age to 18 years old. To me it was a dream come true. Now me and my buddies and the girls could go to lunch in our own cars to the bars and drink freely and legally. We could make it to the liquor store and back in 10 minutes and still make it to the next class. We were “wasted” every single day. Once I didn't get high and the teacher asked me if I was alright, because he was so used to seeing me high. I'm not proud of those days but I know now that whether we understand it or not, God in His Sovereign Love is in total control. His word states, “All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) I did not know then that I was being called by the Lord. Is He calling you today? When I graduated from high school, I began to work full time. And although I still got high every day, I was able to function. When I say “get high” I mean by alcohol or drugs, so don't kid yourself for one second that alcohol is OK. It's the first and WORST DRUG because it's legal. The Word of God says, “Who has woe...? Those who linger long at wine at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper.” (Proverbs 23:29-32). I'm here to tell you that God's Word is the TRUTH.

I did good at my work and ended up buying the business from my boss. I also met a lovely young lady who I asked to marry me. By this time, I'm about 24 years old, still getting wasted every day yet making lots of money and appearing to function normally yet falling deeper and deeper into Satan's plan for my destruction. Oh - you don't believe Satan is real? Well then God must be a liar because God's word says “He (Satan) the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy...” (John 10:10). What does a thief steal? Only valuables. And a smart thief steals the

MOST valuable. So, Satan the “thief” comes to steal God’s Word from you so that he can destroy your life and KILL YOU apart from Jesus. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) God’s Word is His plan for your life - it’s the instruction manual for life. If your car needs a tune-up you must go to the manual to set the timing and gap the plugs. Does your life need a tune-up? God says, “My Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path” (Psalms 119:105). Have you ever driven a car with the lights out at night? You end up in a ditch wrapped around a tree. Have you been driving down the road of life without the light of God’s word? Is your life in a ditch wrapped around a tree? Well, there’s GOOD NEWS in the second part of the verse that talked about the thief. It says, “I (Jesus) have come that they MAY HAVE LIFE and have it more abundantly”. Amen. (John 10:10).

So now I’m 26, engaged to be married and I’ve got tons of money and I want to buy a house. My emptiness inside was horrible, yet I continued to hide behind my “fig leaf” of drugs and booze. I read an ad about a house that sounded perfect. I called the lady and we met her at the house. We looked at it and talked for about an hour and agreed on a price, shook hands, and made a deal. We went home and began to celebrate by getting high, but the Real Estate Agent called me and said that someone else had offered \$20,000 more for the house - could we match that offer? We said “no” and the agent said we had better forget about that house. We got depressed and thought “that was it”. But I got a call from Jane and Bobby Frank who I made the original deal with, and they said, ‘We have prayed about it and God told us to sell you the house.’ Now, mind you, I knew nothing about Christians. I thought this lady was a “wacko”, but I was taking the house. I thought I was “lucky”. Now I know there is no such thing as “luck”. That was when God showed me His hand upon me. He called me when everything was just fine in my life. Jane’s family were Christians and they lived next door to the home I bought. They began to share God’s Word with me, but I didn’t want to hear it. I didn’t understand that God was using them to call me. This was in 1983. So, as I refused to answer God’s call, He methodically took everything from my life that was more important to me than Him. I didn’t realize that “I had nothing I had not been given” (1Cor 4:7). In other words, everything I was and had, God had allowed. You see I wanted the blessings but didn’t want anything to do with “the Blessor”. God’s word says: “But God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

So now I’m free basing cocaine every day and spending hundreds of dollars a day getting high. My wife is threatening to leave. I’m spending all of my business money on coke. So, I go to the rehab because everybody wants me to. I get out in 30 days and the same day I get high. Now I’m really addicted bad. My wife says, “it’s me or the drugs.” And I say, “See you later, honey.” She leaves. That’s one year. The next year I lose my business - mind you all this time I’m hearing God’s Word. God’s word says: “Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) I was going to church sometimes, but I really didn’t want anything to do with God. My health is going now. I need almost a half-gallon of vodka a day to function. I’m bleeding internally. My liver is shot. I’m in 5 or 6 rehabs, and all the time the Christians are everywhere. I can’t get away from them. They’re in the rehabs. They’re next to me on the buses. I leave the rehab and hitch-hike home. The Christians pick me up and say, “God said to pray for you”. I lose my home...now I’m on the street...then another rehab. Doctors told me that I had only 6 months to live if I didn’t stop drinking. I get out and still drink. I have no hope. God’s still calling. I’m still fighting. I won’t pick up the phone. I can do it by myself - I can do it...I can’t do it!!!

Another 6 months rehab - I get high the whole time I’m there. I get out and in two weeks I’m right back to where I was before. I go to a detox where my alcohol level is 4.7. They say “You should be dead” and the Dr’s report says, “He does not appear intoxicated.” Five days there, I get out, no where to go, mind you all this time those blasted Christians are everywhere. I can’t escape them - it’s as if they seek me out and follow me...What do they want? I’m out on the street, I steal a quart of vodka, drink the whole thing...and in a drunken blur...oh no... SOMEONE IS DEAD! God forgive me...Did I do it?... How could this be... not me, I never hurt anyone. I’m arrested but in jail it’s not pretty. I get beat down over some cigarettes. They throw me in the “hole”. I’m now a broken man. What else could happen because of my sin?... I wanna die, please God, if you are there let me die. It’s 100 degrees, no windows. I’m gonna make a rope and hang myself. I believe Satan’s lie that there is freedom in death. I didn’t yet understand that Satan has me right where he wants me. Remember Satan? “...steal, kill and destroy”... He stole God’s Word from me... destroyed my life and now he’s gonna kill me by talking me into suicide. You see, Satan’s real plan is to get you for eternity. If you’re not “in Christ”, he’s already

got this life. Are you gonna let him get the next one?... God's word says: "He that believed on Him (Jesus) is not condemned but he that does not believe is condemned already because He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18) So I'm on my bunk crying, trying to pray. I'm ready to make my noose of death and I hear a sound. A door opens next to me. There is another "hole". I hear a man get put in there. He puts his stuff on the bed and walks to the air vent down by the floor and I hear, "Hey you over there, do you know Jesus Christ?" May God be forever praised...Thank you, Father, it's another Christian. That's right. God's love is so awesome, He followed me to the hole, and in the person of Tony Hardin I was led to Christ.

Tony told me of a new life in Christ, of hope and forgiveness of sins. I'm on the knees of my heart for the first time with my ear to the air vent. For the first time I hear what God's word says, I repented, God opened my eyes, gave me a new heart, and put His Holy Spirit in me. (EZ 36:25-27) Immediately I experienced forgiveness and peace - the back-pack of sin and guilt is gone. I have no more need of "fig leaves".

THE BLOOD OF JESUS DID IT ALL!

An hour later they let me out of the hole, and I get a burning desire to read God's Word. I see Tony and I find out it was a mistake for him to be in the hole and he fought it all the way. But God was in control, and He knew His child Philip was gonna die if He didn't get Tony there quick. He knew I was finally broken. ARE YOU BROKEN YET? What more will it take in your life? God simply wants you to see your helplessness without Him. He delivered me from two death sentences, one from the judgment of my sins and eternal punishment that we are all under - apart from Jesus - and another in the courts. I served 30 full years and then the Lord released me. I am now free and work in prison ministry, sharing the Word everywhere. I have been a Christian now, for quite a few years. God has restored my mind and my health (which Dr's said could never be restored). My family has come to the Lord by grace. God uses me now to speak to anyone still dead in the prison of their sins. He has allowed me to be very fruitful. I have peace and joy in my life like I never thought possible.

God's word says: "Come let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land, if you resist and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it. (Isa 1:18-20) "Won't you come to Him today? "Today is the day of salvation!" (2 Cor 6:2) Take off your fig leaves and be washed in Jesus' blood and join me in the joy of eternal life! If you have read this marvelous work of God's love and even now sense God's presence in your life and would like Jesus to forgive your sins and be your Lord and Savior...Repent of your old ways, tum from your sinful lifestyle. Trust that God 'made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for you, that you might be the righteousness of God in Christ." (2 Cor 5:21) He was your substitute upon that cross, He suffered, bled, and died, was buried and rose again the 3rd day for you. God's word says, "He that believeth on the Son hath ever- lasting life, he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him." (John 3:36) God's word says, "that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus is LORD and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom 10:9) "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved." (Rom 10:13)

If you have done this, begin to read the Bible, it is your food. Read these verses and be sure of your new salvation: 1 John 5:11-13, Romans 10:8-10. True faith believes, trusts, and acts on God's Word. In conclusion, I want you to see one final act of God's sovereignty. About three months after I was saved, I went to a Bible Study in the jail and the Pastor asked me to give my testimony. I stood up and shared with them what you just read about wanting to take my life in "the hole". As I spoke about, "the hole" a man named Tony Hardin seated in the back of the bible study, stood up and said "that was me, that was me!" I said, "Tony, what were you doing in "the hole" for half and hour . . . nobody goes to "the hole" for half an hour??" He said, "No, they misdiagnosed me in medical with something contagious and had to quarantine me. They put me in "the hole" and the Lord led me to share the gospel with you through the air vent. As soon as I did, they came back and took me out again."


Beloved, if you cannot see the hand of God in this, pray He opens up your spiritual eyes. Know in your heart that the same God that sent Tony to “the hole”, put this testimony in your hand!! I ask you today as Pilate asked others . . .

“What shall you do with this man they call Christ?”

There are not enough pages in the world
to write all that Jesus
has done for me through
OUR FATHER'S PERSISTENT LOVE.

Please feel free to write to me...

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God Bless you! Fisherman Philip