

I write this on behalf of my five year-old son, Crispian Daniel, who incessantly bugged me to do so by asking – “Dad, when are you going to write a book where you can tell us how you went from being a bad guy to a good guy.”

Here it is, Crispian.

How Jesus Changed My Life

by Matthew J. Trehella



Chapter One

My Earliest Days

My name is Matthew John Trehella. I was born on August 10th, 1960, in Detroit, Michigan. My mom's name is Louise Ann and my dad's name is Michael Arthur. Both of my parents were raised Catholic. They were married in St. Matthew's Catholic Church located on the east side of Detroit, Michigan in 1958.

My parents took me home to their newly purchased house at 14711 Lappin also located on the east side of Detroit. I was greeted by my older brother, Michael. Shortly thereafter I was baptized as an infant at St. Jude Catholic Church. My godfather was Ed Moltane, a family friend, and my godmother was Val Schuby, my mom's cousin.

My first memory is from when I was three years old. I remember going to get my picture taken with my older brother, Mike, who was four years old. I also remember when I was four or five having a little Fischer-Price hound dog whose legs moved when you pulled it by the string. I also remember having a red hot-rod car that you pedaled.

The latest medical craze at that time was ripping out nearly every kid's tonsils in America – a great money maker for doctors. Apparently God made a mistake when He made that part of our body and the medical profession was on a crusade to correct His oversight. I got my tonsils out with my younger brother, Tom. I was five and he was only two and a half. The whole operation was like a big human warehouse. They would bring in groups of children at a time to rip out their tonsils.

While there for the three day stay, I threw my red stuffed cat out the hospital window on two occasions and the nurses got quite upset with me.

Of all the kids in the room, the nurse decided I would be first to get the shot to put me asleep for surgery. She pulled down my pajamas in the room full of kids (I believe 12 in all) exposing my butt. There was a girl looking at me with a gleeful grin and I remember thinking "I'm gonna look at her butt too." Unfortunately for me, the next thing I remember was waking up with someone trying to get me to eat a small bowl of ice cream.

Our family consisted of five children in total - four boys and one girl. My brother Mike was the oldest. I was second. My sister Mary was nestled right

in the middle – two boys older and two younger. Well-protected. My brother Tom was fourth, and my brother Jeff brought up the rear.

My mom was a classic merciful mom. Well, at least compared to my dad. One of her favorite phrases was – “wait till your dad gets home” (the most dreaded words a kid could ever hear). She almost always remembered to tell him when he got there.

My dad was short on words and quick on corporal punishment. He was once painting a picnic table he had built a bright red color. I was near the paint can – just four years old – waving my foot near it. Dad warned me several times to stop or I’d kick the can over.

I thought – “Pffft, not a chance would I do that.” Somehow my foot slipped and I did! Red paint coursed across the driveway. I turned on my heels and ran for the door yelling for my mom the whole way. Dad caught me just short of the back door handle. Let’s say I learned to respect, fear, and listen to my dad.

Being raised Catholic, we went to mass every Sunday. It was the longest hour of the week for me. An event I found nearly unbearable. I was given a scapula to wear. I thought that was pretty cool.

God was not in my thoughts much as a young boy however.

I remember praying with my brother Mike on a few occasions. One time we were praying for people to get out of Purgatory. Mike said we had to pray 500 Hail Mary’s or Our Father’s in order to get someone sprung. We prayed about 30 or 40 of them and then I quit, figuring if it took that much effort, as far as I was concerned, they could stay there. Mike kept going though.

Santa Claus was big at our house. So was the Easter Bunny. I viewed God as being somewhere in the mix with them. Mike was seven and I was six when we realized Santa was a fraud. Mike took it pretty hard.

Before that revelation, we once went over to our grandparents house who lived on Three Mile Dr. in Detroit. Before we left our home to go over there, we left a plate of cookies for Santa. When we returned home, the plate of cookies was eaten and all the gifts were under the tree. My dad said we just missed Santa, and Mike swore he saw his sleigh going around the corner as we were coming up the road. The rest of us kids were awestruck that he was fortunate enough to see such a thing.

Another Christmas, my godfather dressed up as Santa, brought the gifts over early in the morning and put them under the tree. He then crept up the stairs where we were sleeping and yelled very loudly “Ho Ho Ho, Merry Christmas.” This caused no small stir in our home and nearly gave my grandmother, who was sleeping upstairs with us and had no idea this was going to happen, a heart attack.

I’ve never had any broken bones, but I did have some bad experiences. When I was about three or four, I was climbing up into my chair. I happened to catch the edge of a saucer which was holding a freshly poured cup of hot coffee. The coffee spilled down my legs and I screamed. My dad pulled my pajamas off and my skin came off my legs with them.

When my dad took me outside, the neighbor, Mr. Mason, an elderly gentleman, was already waiting in his car at the end of our driveway. He had heard the screams. When I got to the hospital, I was put in a bed of ice. I remember a lady came by and asked what happened to me. She felt sorry for me and gave me five dollars (a good sum of money for a little kid in those days).

I also had some near death experiences. When I was five, my parents took me to a park. There was a lake there. I went off by myself out into the lake. I kept going out farther and farther to see how far I could go before the water would reach my mouth and nose.

When the water was up to my chin, after debating it for a minute, I took one more step. There must have been a drop off because I went under like a rock. Somehow I was able to get turned around out from under the water. I was gasping for air and choking. I made it out of the water crying and asking “Where is my mom?” A park warden with a big hat and uniform knelt down in front of me and asked what happened. I did not answer him, rather, I just walked away from him crying and asking “Where is my mom?”

Another time when I was about seven, my mom and us kids were in downtown Detroit at the Cobo Hall. We were on the roof of the parking structure. There were walls about three feet tall separating the different parts of the structure. I ran toward one very fast, thinking, “I’ll just leap up and throw myself over to the other side in one swift motion.”

When I leaped up onto the wall however, I realized I did not have enough speed to fling myself over in one swift motion. Good thing too because there was no structure on the other side! There I was on all fours on top of the wall

(which was **about** three feet wide) looking down five stories at the cement sidewalk below. Once again, God had spared me.

Chapter Two

My First Realization (Awakening)

I was seven years old when I first realized that this place called earth abode in darkness. I remember thinking - what is this place? Is this all there is? There has to be more to life than what I see with my eyes. The vanity of life – its seeming meaninglessness – struck me at a young age.

At age seven, I went to our family bathroom and held a razor to my wrist – thinking about ending it all right there. After about ten minutes, I put the razor back. I would continue on. Someone was knocking on the bathroom door.

Later in life, after having come to know Christ, I would see the wisdom of God in subjecting us to the vanity of life. It helps point us to Jesus.

Going down the same road to work each day; doing the same old job; eating in the same old lunch room; seeing the same people; driving home down the same old road – doing it all over and over again – yeah, it helps us realize that there must be something more to life.

Many people have this realization. I think it odd if someone never does have this realization. There is a void. All people at some point in their lives seem to sense it or realize it.

People try various ways to fill this void. Some do so through relationships. But usually, most all relationships at some point crumble and those who have put their stock into relationships being the purpose of life are destroyed, or they begin to slowly rot inside. People always fail us. We fail others.

Others look to wealth and materialism. But this too results in vanity. The high from the trip to the mall with its various purchases is short-lived. The man who succeeds in business soon realizes he has become a target for other men's greed. All successful businessmen end up with lawsuits against them. They one day realize their wealth is vain – like the Pharaohs of old who put

all their “stuff” around them when they were buried – the wealthy realize they won’t have a U-Haul following their hearse.

Sex is the distraction for others. My brother Mike once told me when we were young adults, “The first thought I have as soon as I’m done having sex with a girl is *‘Why did I do that?’*” He went on to explain that he felt so empty and unfulfilled inside when it was over. There was no commitment. He was just satisfying his sexual urges and desires.

Man always wants to suppress the confrontation with the vanity of life. Many throw themselves into sexual licentiousness precisely because of their realization of the vanity of life. They figure, “Hey, all is vain in this life – so I might as well do what feels good for me.” Rather than search and seek further, they view their conclusion as a fine means to justify their sin.

For me it became drugs.

Chapter Three

School Stories

I despised school. I viewed it as a prison. Three o’clock was about all I looked forward to each day – the hour of freedom. When I was only age 8, I wondered – who came up with this idea? And moreso, why do people unquestioningly, blithely go along with it?

The separation from parents and family seemed unnatural to me. I remember kids crying their eyes out the first day of kindergarten. Parents had convinced themselves: “This is good for the child. It will teach them to make it on their own.” They viewed it as a rite of passage – besides – it happened to them and they turned out just fine. Most never seemed to ponder the absurdity of the whole system.

The first five years of school I attended St. Jude Catholic School on Seven Mile Rd. When I was in the third grade, at the age of eight, I got in a fight with the school bully – the champion of third grade bullies – David Wills. I don’t remember how it happened. I do remember watching David Wills bully many other kids – so I avoided him like the plague. The goal was to blend in and not be noticed whenever he was around.

I successfully accomplished this for nearly a year. But one day out on the playground, there I was, suddenly the attention of David Wills' sadistic designs. A crowd soon gathered. Whenever Wills did his bullying a crowd of students would gather. Like a collective sigh of relief that it wasn't them being targeted, they joined in and reveled in the demeaning and belittling of Wills' latest target.

I had pride. I also always had this little thing in me that despised injustice. I never joined the crowds to add insult to Wills' victims. Of course, I would never intervene either as I also had this other little thing in me called self-preservation. But now it was ME.

As Wills taunted me to fight and the gathered crowd looked on with anxiety to satiate their bloodlust, I suddenly remember everything going into slow-motion and no longer hearing sounds. About the third time Wills shoved me, I burst into a flurry of punches – writhing in all directions. The Tasmanian Devil would have been proud.

I don't recall if I even landed one punch on Wills, but some poor kid standing by had a bloody nose, the crowd was stunned, and Wills was stymied. He did make two direct punches onto me, but I was so filled with adrenaline that I didn't even flinch from them.

A teacher soon arrived to break up the fight – something I was counting on before he would hurt me too bad.

The outcome of it all? I won Wills respect. He never bothered me again, and always treated me kindly – like an equal. The other students in the school thought I was crazy and avoided confrontation with me at all costs. The fight was talked about for years after it ended – things legends are made of (or maybe I really was that nuts that day).

I also formed my own outfit. A clique made up of a collection of misfits at the school. We all hung out together on the playground – a sort of safety net which we all understood was needed for our continued survival. We never bothered or bullied any other kids, rather we spent most of our time with magnifying glasses burning ants into oblivion whenever the sun was out.

Third grade overall was a rough year for me. There were four third grade classes and I spent time in three of them. My time in the first class ended when I cussed at the teacher – so I was moved to a nun's class.

I was kicked out of the nun's class for wrestling with her, cussing at her, and then running out of the school all the way home in the rain. I finished the year out in the third class.

The next year, in fourth grade, I was kicked out of Sister Sarafica's class for kicking her in the leg and cussing at her when she pulled me by the ear.

The next year in fifth grade I cussed at Mr. Taylor – but he didn't kick me out. We ended up getting along after that.

Some law was passed by the government in 1970 that made my parents unable to any longer afford our attending Catholic school. The next year we were at a public school.

In sixth grade, I continued my pattern of run-ins with teachers. Mr. Dunlap, the assistant principal, had only one arm – but every kid in the school feared him like Blackbeard the Pirate. Foolish me wasn't impressed.

I ended up in quite the physical altercation – finally kicking him and running all the way home.

You might be wondering what happened to me when I got home on these many occasions. My dad would give me an A-1 beating - every time. Yet I'd do it again.

I was the black sheep.

Chapter Four

The End of Innocence

On Christmas Eve, 1971, when I was eleven years old, the idyllic world I had known of a mom and dad in the house, a routine schedule, baseball and apple pie would all come crashing down around me. My mom called all five of us kids into the upstairs bedroom where me and my three brothers slept and informed us that our dad had left, they were getting a divorce, and he wouldn't be living there anymore.

My dad left.

Upon hearing this, a small part of me felt relieved that I would no longer have to hear their incessant fighting and arguing. But a much larger part of me felt a huge, chasm-like hole in my heart and in my stomach.

Little did I know how adversely this would affect my mother. A few weeks after announcing this to us, she was taken to a hospital for a nervous breakdown where she remained for a few months. My grandparents came and lived with us while both parents were now gone.

Divorce is an ugly thing. It mires the mind of a child. It leaves him ill-prepared and at a distinct disadvantage with his peers for the life that lies ahead of him or her. It removes all innocence. What order his life once had is left strewn on the floor. The most foundational part of his life which gives cohesiveness to his existence is gone. Life no longer has the promise it once did.

I remember my brothers and sister walking around looking shell-shocked for days after that news. Like refugees of some war-torn city.

But the reverberations of a divorce on a child goes on much longer – for days, months, years, and decades. You never truly see all the negative consequences until you have your own children, until you grow old as a man.

In 1971 it was still a shame and an oddity to come from a divorced home, I remember walking down the street with a friend several months after my dad left. He confessed to me that his parents were divorced. So I told the first person ever that my parents were divorced.

His pain must have been deep because he seized upon my words with surprise. He then proceeded to run down the street and yell at the top of his lungs on that warm spring day “This guy’s parents (pointing at me) are divorced! This guy comes from a divorced home!” As though it made him feel better to spread the hurt.

American society has made it their sole point when it comes to divorce to try and remove any shame associated with it (just watch the 18 million Hollywood films trying to convince us of this). This is the mission. This is the virtue. We should have no shame associated with divorce. A divorced child should never feel bad, inferior, or abnormal about his parents being divorced.

They strain at a gnat while they swallow camels.

You can do all the rationalization you want to try and convince yourself that your divorce (which 80% of the time has something to do with the “happiness” of the parent) is “better” for your children. The truth is – divorce is an ugly thing. It has far-reaching, long-lasting implications and consequences.

Every scientific study ever done on children from divorced homes proves that assertion – overwhelmingly. And every child from a divorced home doesn’t need a scientific study to convince him or her of the awfulness of divorce.

It sickens my heart when I overhear people talking to people having trouble in their marriage and they encourage the person – with the most-self-absorbed arguments – to end their marriage.

Divorce is like a bad plague – it spreads from home to home.

One of my fondest times with my father was playing catch in the front of our house. I would never do that with him again. Innocence had ended.

Chapter Five

The Downward Spiral

Once my dad left things spiraled downward for me. My grades in school began to suffer. I used humor to try and cover the pain – and was even voted “class clown” in the seventh grade. An honor to me.

I no longer showed proper respect for my mother. Respect was no longer in my heart. I exploited her motherly love and mercy to satisfy my rebellious desires. Dad was gone – threat of bodily harm for bad deeds was removed. And the disdain for my father grew; mixed with the confusion of love – my love for him.

When you are a child and your parents split up, you hold out the hope - really, the fantasy – that they will get back together again. It rarely happens, though countless Hollywood films have used the plot. I too held this hope in my heart.

A year into my dad leaving and the divorce being finalized, a devastating event took place. I was at my dad's with all my brothers and sisters (my dad had visitation – every other weekend would be spent at his new home) along with the woman my dad had left my mom to be with.

We were all sleeping in the living room. My dad and the woman were in the kitchen. I heard them talking. It crushed my heart to hear him say things he should only be saying to my mother. Finally, I crawled out of my sleeping bag and took a peek around the corner. There was my dad and the woman looking into each other's eyes – kissing.

I quickly pulled back. Devastated. Stunned. Dazed. Catatonic. I knew then that the hope in my heart *was* a fantasy; a mere mirage. There would be no recovery. There would be no happy family. For me, it was a demarcation point in my life – far worse than the news that my dad had left. Now I knew he was truly gone.

I saw little to live for prior to this event – now I saw absolutely nothing subsequent to it. I began to hang out with all the wrong people. I despised how plastic people were and noticed everyone else's hypocrisy. My fights at school increased.

The neighborhood where I grew up had changed since I was a boy. Though I was white, I was now a minority. By the time I was 13, drugs and crime began to be a part of my life. Things were getting ugly.

Chapter Six

Light Comes to the Trewhella Home

My mother's conversion

I smoked my first joint at age 13. I never bought a bag of weed. The first thing I bought was a pound. I figured – “Why spend money on the stuff – when you can just buy a pound; sell it; make money; and have all you want to smoke for free?” Seemed simple enough to me.

So I used the money I had saved from my paper route – yes I was a newspaper boy. Up at 5:00 am delivering to homes on my bicycle. I made

about 20 dollars a week. Half I made went to my mom to support the family – the other half was mine. I had been saving.

When I was 15 years old, my mom kicked me out of her house for dealing drugs.

My 10 year-old brother found the bags of dope hid in my room. He took it to my mom wondering what it was. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. My mom called the police and thus began my career in the juvenile courts. She threw me out of the house when I returned home about a week later.

I went and lived with my dad.

After six months at his place – he threw me out of his house.

I was 15 years old and nowhere to go, so I went back to my mom's house.

I stood outside for a while. I hadn't seen her in six months. I thought – “Now I'll have to put up with her mouth again.” I was a rebellious young punk.

After the divorce and breakdown, my mom had been on drugs to try and keep her mood swings from being too dramatic. She tried many other things to find meaning and peace in her life. She always went to counselors and shrinks. She tried relationships with men. She even tried Silva Mind Control – and a host of other suggestions from friends and the world.

The thought of enduring her mouth made it difficult to knock on that door. But life had humbled me – I had nowhere else to go.

I walked up to the front door and knocked. The door opened – and my mom got a big smile on her face upon seeing me. She exclaimed – “Matt! Come on in I have to tell you what happened to me.”

I found that odd.

I went in and sat down on the couch in the living room. My mom began to tell me how Jesus had changed her life; she had flushed all her pills down the toilet; and God had forgiven her of her sins.

My mother explained how my godmother, Val Schuby, had pointed her to Jesus. She stated the last she had heard of Val she was in a padded room at a

mental hospital. She had destroyed herself through alcoholism. But my mom had heard through family that she was doing much better now.

So my mom decided to invite her over. When she arrived, my mom was amazed at how good she looked. She repeatedly asked her what counselor she was seeing. My mom thought a good counselor was the answer to all one's problems – she had just never found that person yet. My godmother wouldn't tell her.

Finally, after demanding for the fourth time that Val tell her the name of her counselor (so my mom could go see him), my godmother told her simply – “It's Jesus, Annie. Jesus changed my life.”

My mom told me she was stunned by her words. Finally, she responded to my godmother and said, “Very funny – no seriously, who are you seeing?”

My godmother shared with my mom how she was in the padded room at the mental hospital. She said a few women who were part of a prayer group came in to pray over her. The Lord restored her mind and she believed in Jesus. Her life was radically changed.

My mom said her mouth was still hanging open while my godmother explained all this to her. She just found it inexplicably hard to believe.

My godmother went on to explain that she didn't want to tell my mom of what had happened to her because everyone she told the story to looked at her oddly and thought it strange - and then summed it up by telling her – “That's good for you Val – you needed that.” So she did not want to tell my mom. She was tired of rejection and being patronized.

But my mom was different. Though leery, she went with my godmother to the prayer meeting and she too found the forgiveness of her sins that my godmother spoke of. Her life was radically changed also.

Sitting there on the couch listening to my mother tell this story – I could tell something good had happened to my mom. I knew she was different. She was not the same person I had known.

I went to the prayer meeting with her. This was during a time of renewal and revival for many in the 70's. People of various denominations were truly finding Christ. There were hundreds of people at this prayer meeting.

I went twice. My mom also gave me a book to read. She knew I was in a gang, so she gave me the book titled “*The Cross and The Switchblade.*” A true account of a country minister from Pennsylvania named David Wilkerson who the Lord called to New York City to minister to gang members there.

I read about the first 50 pages. I liked the stuff about the gang activity. But then “God stuff” started getting more prevalent in the story so I quit reading it.

I was happy in my sin.

Chapter Seven

Drugs, Crime, and Hate

Short venue of my life of crime

Though I could write for hundreds of pages on the three years of my life in a gang, I will be brief – as I have been throughout this short paper. I see no value in going into the many stories. I have told my children *some* of them over the years.

Suffice it to say I dealt drugs, stole cars, firebombed houses, robbed businesses, burglarized homes, fought other gangs, and fenced stolen items to the Mafia. Amongst other nefarious activities.

Our gang was called the White Knights. We fought black gangs on the east side of Detroit like the Black Killers and Errol Flynn's, as well as others.

I was raised in a home where we were taught not to judge people by their race or nationality, but to judge each person individually by their character. But what I encountered in Detroit schools caused me to dislike black people – even to hate them. Many bad experiences.

For example - as I said earlier – white people were a minority in Detroit. After busing began through the federal courts, white flight took place and those of us too poor to move to the suburbs became an even smaller minority. Busing was an attempt by the state to integrate black and white children. It was utter foolishness. Most people – both black and white – thought so.

I was 15 when busing began. I was bussed to Pershing High School. Things were already bad enough for us at Denby High School, but this was worse. As a welcome gift to all us white kids, the black kids pulled the fire alarm and then proceeded to beat us badly in the vestibules as we tried to leave the building.

I spent three years in the 10th grade. I never did graduate high school.

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Move up in time. I am now 17 years-old. I was sick of my life. I knew there had to be more to life than what I could see with my eyes – but I did not know what it was. Why were we here? Why was *I* here on planet earth? Everything seemed pointless.

I got into a knife fight with a black gang member in November of 1977. Both of us had other gang members there observing the fight. I was cut in the head at my eye-brow. As blood flowed down my face, a guy in my gang hit the black gang member with a brick. They retreated with their wounded friend, as did our side with me.

We soon found out where the kid lived who had cut me. Three nights later – we firebombed his house. We watched under cover of darkness as the firetrucks, police, and the crowd gathered.

Later we went to a guy's home who dealt in thousands of hits of acid or mescaline at a time. He had a dog named Satan. We each took some acid – something I had done scores of times. After that we went to a pool hall. I saw a painting of the devil sitting on a toilet. I thought it odd.

I then went home. It was about 3:00 a.m. As I passed by my mother's bedroom door to go into the bathroom, she spoke to me saying – “Matt! What's wrong with you?” I said – “What?” She said again, “What's wrong with you?” I said, “Nothing is wrong with me.” She said, “What's wrong with you?” She then turned on the light and had in her hand all of my “T” (PCP – a drug I was using and dealing heavily) and my syringe.

She went to the basement and threw it all into the incinerator.

I stumbled into the bathroom shocked by it all. The only thing I was thinking about was how to start over again – I had just lost a lot of money.

I went upstairs to my bed...

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Pause the story for a moment. Go back in time one week to the day because what happened then is important to this story.

One week earlier, a friend and I were at this girl's house. We were hanging out with these two girls.

While there, I noticed what looked like a gameboard of sorts. It was actually a Ouija board. It was a game – a satanic sort of game. But these two girls found it useful for more than just a game.

I asked them what it was – and they told me it was a Ouija board. Neither I nor my friend had ever heard of such a thing. I asked her what she used it for. She said that they pray to the devil on it. My friend and I laughed.

I noticed that there were round circles at a couple of locations on the board where it looked like someone had sprinkled sulphur on it and lit it on fire. She told me that sometimes the devil would start a fire on the board when they prayed to him, resulting in the marks. Again, my friend and I laughed.

We harangued them and mocked them. I didn't believe in God, the devil or anything like that – so I found it all slightly intriguing and hugely humorous.

Finally, I asked them to pray to the devil and tell me something that was going to happen to me. So, they placed their fingers on the edge of the board; closed their eyes; and began to chant some gibberish. My friend and I looked at each other with smirks on our faces thinking – “Can you believe how far they're taking this?”

Suddenly they both stopped their gibberish at the same time – that was a little freaky. They opened their eyes, and the one girl proceeded to tell me that in one week I would lose all of my “T”.

Do you now see how this was germane to the story I am telling? My friend and I laughed it all off.

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So to continue... I went up to bed; laid down; and pondered how to get back on my feet financially again.

Suddenly, the thought ran across my head – “It has been one week and you just lost all your ‘T’.” A voice then spoke to me, not audibly (at least I don’t think so) but in my head, and said, “Tonight you will be mine.” I began to hear satanic sounding laughter.

I sat up in the bed because I thought I was going to suffocate. Every time I laid down I thought I would suffocate. The voice (who I took as Satan) kept telling me “Tonight you will be mine.” I was too scared to get out of the bed.

I stayed in the bed for about 45 minutes covered in sweat. Totally paranoid. I had done acid many times with many weird experiences – I knew this had nothing to do with acid.

Finally, I bolted from my bed; ran downstairs to my mother’s room; woke her up; and told her “I want to get saved!” My mom, being woken from sleep to such an announcement, said, “What?” I said, “I want to get saved.” I knew at this point that the devil was real – and if the devil was real, then I knew that God was real. And I was headed to hell. She said OK. Had me sit on the edge of the bed and led me in a prayer confessing my sins and professing my faith in Jesus.

After she was done, I told her to take me to the hospital. She looked stunned and asked why. I told her just take me. I did not want to tell her why. The reason was I felt as though I was going to kill her and my sister (who was also in the house) with a knife and then run down the street and kill anyone I saw. I just wanted to get strapped down till it passed.

We argued for 20 minutes. It was intense. But finally, she took me out to the living room; had me lay down on the couch; and my mom prayed with me for the next two hours until I fell asleep.

The next day, I got up; went to a friend’s house; got messed up on drugs; and talked with him about God for the next four hours. I now believed in God. I simply reasoned – I now know the devil is real, and if the devil is real, then God must be real.

Though I did not truly begin to walk with Christ at that time, my life, which was already going steeply downhill – began a straight down slide.

Chapter Eight

Learning Why I Exist

My conversion experience

In early April, 1978, I was arrested and charged with arson. The arrest was the culmination of a massive investigation by law enforcement into the dozens of fires that had occurred in our area.

Though I was a minor – still only 17, when charged with a felony in Michigan at that age, you are charged as an adult. Off I went to the county jail. I was released soon after.

On May 19th, I was scheduled for a plea deal where I was to be sentenced to three years of probation. However, when I arrived at court, there was a sudden turn of events. I was placed in the county jail so that psychiatric tests could be redone after I was off drugs for several days due to incarceration. The providence of God soon shone to light.

I was placed in a holding cell for the weekend with two black guys – one 17 like me and the other 42 years-old. The 17 year-old was in for armed robbery, and the 42 year-old for molestation. We all knew a little bit about God.

I knew some from my mom. The young guy from his dad who was a deacon in a Baptist church. And the older guy said he once walked with the Lord, but had turned away from Him. We talked a *lot* about God.

We were near where church service was held in jail, but could not attend because we would not be processed till Monday. The young guy asked for something to read from a man in a suit. He was with the church that came in to conduct the service – he gave us each bibles.

I noticed that when I read the Bible or talked with the other two about God that I felt good, but when I didn't, I felt the brunt of my drug withdrawal. I have often thought how I would love to see a film of those discussions – three pagans talking about God.

* * * * *

When Monday came, I was processed into the general population. I never saw those two men I spent the weekend with ever again.

I was placed in a cellblock which had nine men to a cell. Upon entering the cell, the top dog came up to me and informed me that they had two rules in the cell. First, no one starts fights. Two, if you start a fight, everyone else jumps on you. I looked around the room and couldn't help but notice I was the youngest and scrawniest guy in there. I told him, "I like these rules."

He took me to my bunk. He saw that I had a Bible. He proceeded to tell me how he had lived a life of sin and was in jail for murdering a taxi driver. He would spend the rest of his life in prison. He was now a Christian – it seemed truly so. He encouraged me to walk with Christ. He was an older man (about 55) exhorting a younger man not to waste his life on sin, but to live for Jesus. He encouraged me from the Scriptures several times during the five days we were together.

I was on the top bunk. And when I climbed up, there was a metal shelf attached to the wall next to the bed. There was one book sitting on it – "*The Cross and The Switchblade*" by David Wilkerson. I was surprised. I picked up the book and began to read where I had left off two years earlier.

Two days later, I had just finished the book and placed it on the metal shelf. No sooner had I done that and the guard came to our cell and informed me that my probation officer was there to meet with me.

I went in a little room. She told me that my sentence was going to change – I would have to spend the first year in a drug rehab program. She went on to say that they were going to try and get me into a drug rehab program called Teen Challenge. "*The Cross and The Switchblade*" was all about how Teen Challenge started through David Wilkerson. I noted that in my mind, thinking – "Wow. How weird is that?"

The probation officer said I would have a man from Teen Challenge visit me tomorrow for an interview. She also gave me a 30 page questionnaire to fill out. She told me I would have to have it filled out to give the man when I did the interview the next day. She stated that I would have *no* chance of getting into Teen Challenge if I did not fill out the questionnaire and do the interview.

She went on to explain that though I was being tried as an adult, I was still a minor. So the judge was allowing my mom to have some say in the drug rehab program I would be in for a year. She wanted me to be in a Christian program, not a secular one where the state tears you down and rebuilds you to conform with society.

The next day the man arrived from Teen Challenge. But I had been taken to the psyche ward down the road to be re-evaluated. By the time he got over there, I had been taken back to the jail. He never did get to do the interview, nor did he get my questionnaire.

This too was in God's providence. Had he gotten the questionnaire I would not have been accepted. Why? Because though I was sick of my life (something Teen Challenge looks for in possible program candidates), I was always a smart-mouth. So I gave smart-mouth answers on various questions.

For example, they asked me – “What do you think of Teen Challenge?” I wrote – “Great – if you want to be a monk.”

My mom received a call later that afternoon from Teen Challenge informing her that the interview did not take place, nor was my questionnaire turned in, and besides they had an 8 month waiting list to get in the program – hence, I would *not* be allowed into the program.

My mom was depressed from hearing this news.

Her prayer meeting was that evening. She decided not to go to the meeting because court was the next day and she wasn't going to be able to tell the judge that I had been accepted at Teen Challenge.

But at the last minute she decided to go to her prayer meeting.

The meeting was attended by about 400 people and there was always a speaker before prayer time. Unbeknownst to her – guess who the speaker was that evening? The Executive Director of Detroit Teen Challenge! Again, God's providence.

When he was done speaking, my mom approached him; explained my situation; and awaited his response. He put his hand on her shoulder and told her – “Mrs. Trehwella, bring your son's clothes to court tomorrow – I will make sure he gets in the program.” My mom wept.

* * * * *

When I arrived at Teen Challenge that Friday evening, May 26th, 1978, most of the brothers were out somewhere. The two that were there shared with me as my mother had about coming to know Jesus.

They explained that I had sinned – all men sin – and I therefore needed forgiveness from God. The wages of sin is death – I deserved death for my sins. But, they went on to explain, Jesus had died in my place. He was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. So that if any man would turn from his sin and believe in Jesus – God would forgive him of his sins and accept him as part of His beloved. That I would be accepted of God. That I would be radically changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I wanted this.

Two days later, Sunday, May 28th, 1978, we went to church. On the ride there I noticed all the cement. I noticed all the drudgery.

We arrived at Brightmoor Tabernacle – an Assemblies of God church of about a 1000 people.

When I went inside, people came up to me and told me they were glad to see me. I felt a genuineness from them – that they really were glad to see me; that they weren't just glad to see me because I had a joint to smoke or something like that.

We entered the sanctuary. Everyone was talking. I thought – “These people are acting like they're getting ready to watch a movie or something.” I was use to churches being “ssshhhh” quiet.

Finally, a woman came out and began to play the piano. A man began to sing. All the people quit talking and joined in the singing. What amazed me was that they sang like they actually believed God existed – they weren't just mumbling under their breath.

As the people worshipped, I felt as though I were going to cry. I didn't want anyone to see that, so I sat down in the pew and put my face in my hands.

As I sat there, I felt truly bad – for the first time – as to how I had lived my life. Understand, I had told the shrink at the psyche ward just three days earlier that I would burn down more houses when I got out of jail. I had no true understanding of just how wicked I was.

But sitting there – I saw my sin for how truly reprehensible it was. I was in the presence of a holy God. The Holy Spirit was convicting me of my sin. He was showing me that I was a sinner – and that I was in need of the Savior.

I wept through the entire one and half hour church service.

At the end, when they called people forward who wanted to give their life to Christ, I didn't go up – I knew I already knew Him. I knew I was forgiven of my sins.

I now knew *why I existed* – it was to live for Him – to glorify Him in the earth!

I tasted His love and holiness.

His love amazed me. I did not love myself. I did not believe anyone loved me. I didn't believe my own mother could love me. Yet, *He* loved me!

[*How Deep the Father's Love For Us*](#) is one of my favorite songs.

Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders,
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice,
call out among the scoffers.

His dying breath has brought me life,
I know that it is finished.

What should I gain from His reward,
I cannot give an answer,
But this I know with all my heart,
His wounds have paid my ransom.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom,
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.

My life was radically transformed. On the ride home, I no longer saw the cement. Rather I saw every little weed growing out of the cracks in the cement. The sun seemed brighter. I no longer had three cuss words in every sentence. I actually felt love for others in my heart. I no longer hated black people.

And I actually thirsted to read my Bible. I longed to get alone with Him in prayer.

Just two weeks later, Teen Challenge took me out on the streets to tell others of Jesus. I am so thankful they did this. Though incredibly scared (and feeling odd) at first – I soon realized how important it was to tell others of Him. They established a lifelong pattern for me – telling others of Jesus.

Epilogue

So now you know the story Crispian (though so many years since you pleaded with me to write it). And so do all my other children – Sara, Joshua, Jeremiah, Darby, Isabel, Traolach, Matthew, Rochelle, Priscilla, and Margaret. And now our 13 (so far!) grandchildren can know too.

But I have so much more to say.

I plan to make this a Pilgrim's Progress type of writing. I want to talk about what I have learned as a Christian man subsequent to coming to know Christ. I hope to add it to this work a year from today (or two years at the most!) and re-publish it all.

But for now – may this suffice. I have made it to the cross in my little account. I have told a variation of this story thousands of times when telling others of Jesus. Now it is in writing. May it reach countless more through this means.

I have published this on the 38th anniversary of my coming to know Jesus Christ – my born-again birth date if you will – May 28th, 2016.

CHRISTUS VINCIT!

*Matthew Trewhella is the pastor of [Mercy Seat Christian Church \(MercySeat.net\)](http://MercySeat.net) and founder of [Missionaries to the Preborn \(MissionariesToThePreborn.com\)](http://MissionariesToThePreborn.com). He and his wife, Clara, have eleven children and reside in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. You can obtain his book *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates: A Proper Response to Tyranny and A Repudiation of Unlimited Obedience to Civil Government* at Amazon.com or by going to the websites www.DefyTyrants.com or www.LesserMagistrate.com.*