

Lon's Story

Although I'm not very proud of my testimony, I believe God has given me a tremendous message to share; a message that involves the relentless faithfulness and unconditional love of a Heavenly Father. I first heard about Jesus Christ while attending a Japanese Catholic school for the first nine years of my education. I learned about Christ there, but I didn't know Him on a personal level. In my second year of college, a high school friend had been witnessing to me for approximately one year and I had noticed a significant change in his life, so in the spring of 1985 I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I began to attend Calvary Chapel of West Covina with Pastor Raul Ries and my walk with the Lord was tremendous.

Unfortunately, I was dreaded college and I decided to pursue a law enforcement career instead. I entered the Rio Hondo police academy and was hired by the city of Inglewood. God was very faithful to me during my training at the police academy. At the time, the Rio Hondo Police Academy prided itself on having the highest "stress level" and attrition rate of any police academy in the state of California. I vividly recall going home every night exhausted and humiliated, pleading and praying with God to give me the strength to survive another day. After 16 weeks of intense character-defining training, I proudly graduated in a class of 47 officers that originated with 81 cadets. It was one of the proudest days of my life. I was extremely grateful to God for giving me the strength to survive and I excitedly looked forward to "hitting the streets."

There is a dark side to police work and I encountered it numerous times during my first year of training and much of it conflicted with my Christian faith. I remember God convicting me about it. Unfortunately, I made a conscious effort to place my career before my faith, boastfully telling God that I didn't need Him any longer because I worked too hard and sacrificed too much for my accomplishments.

My whole identity was based on the prestige of the badge I carried and the income I earned. I was trained to be a good, street-smart, aggressive cop in one of the most violent cities on the west coast and I knew I was good at it. Initially, I loved my job-- the vehicle and foot pursuits, the kicking and crashing down of doors, the stakeouts and the ensuing arrests of drug dealers and gang members-- it all seemed to satisfy my hunter-gatherer instincts! Soon, I became a very violent, angry and pessimistic person. I started to see a very dark side of society that was extremely sickening. The sexual assaults on women and children, the endless domestic abuse calls, the innocent victims of homicide, rape and robbery, the politics of the department and the rumors of marital infidelity, founded and unfounded.

I didn't want to deal with the pain and I tried to numb it with alcohol and sex. However, the pain didn't go away. As time quickly passed, I found myself served with three lawsuits involving allegations of excessive use of force. One amounted to a \$2.5

million wrongful death suit. Further, I was involved in a horrendous accident in which I struck a pedestrian at 56 mph. One day, it finally all came to an end. After a six -month investigation, my partner and I were terminated for allegations of excessive use of force in a narcotics raid. When I was told to hand in my badge and gun, I was devastated. I felt a part of me had just died. I felt betrayed by my department and I remembered being angry and bitter at the world.

A month later, my girlfriend, who I had been dating for 6 ½ years, broke up with me. One Sunday morning, after a month of trying to reconcile with her to no avail, I found myself no longer possessing anything I had valued-- no career, relationship, money or friends. I wanted to end my life. I remember the strong temptation of the loaded 9mm handgun sitting there, but for some reason, I just couldn't pull the trigger. I felt a "tugging" on my heart to turn back to God, but I felt too guilty. Suddenly, I broke down and cried for approximately three hours and I began to confess to God all the wicked and evil things I had committed. For the first time in over four years, I went back to church that night and rededicated my life to the Lord. I wept throughout the entire service.

I wish I could say that life has been "happily ever after." It hasn't. I felt God calling me to be a pastor, but first I knew God wanted me to deal with my issues and I went through counseling for approximately two years. Unfortunately, there has been a lot of pain since then; the death of my father and many close relatives, a failed marital engagement and various trials and tribulations. But through all of that, I decided to finish with my undergraduate degree in biblical studies at Azusa Pacific University. Sometimes, consequences from your past return, but God grants you the strength to deal with them. While I attended APU, the previous \$2.5 million wrongful death lawsuit resurfaced. And, although there was an article in the newspaper about me possibly going to prison, the Lord took care of it and the case was settled out of court.

God has blessed me with a wonderful wife, Jenna who has been an incredible partner in life and in ministry. In May of 2003, I graduated with my Master's of Divinity from the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University. In February of 2004, I planted a multi-ethnic church called Generations that currently meets in Torrance, California. Throughout this incredible journey, God has been completely faithful in His love, grace and mercy. Although pastoring a church plant has its challenges, I'm so grateful to God for all that He has blessed me. God has taught me to receive His immeasurable grace, to fully know His forgiveness and to truly experience His unconditional love!