

Redeemed

Michael Stewart speaks from Prison

In 2005, a Polk County jury found Michael E. Stewart guilty of first-degree premeditated murder, first-degree felony murder in the perpetration of kidnapping, kidnapping, a Class C felony, and tampering with evidence, a Class C felony. The murder convictions were merged, and the defendant was sentenced to life and to eight years for the two Class C felonies, which are to be served concurrently to each other but consecutively to the life sentence, for an effective sentence of life plus eight years.

The case stemmed from Stewart's July 2002 attack on Willard Trentham who died as a result of his injuries. Details of the incident(s) are explained in detail in Stewart's 2016 appeal at <https://law.justice.com/cases/tennessee/court-of-criminal-appeals/2016/e2015-00418-cca-r3-pc.html>. Stewart has been in prison since 2003 and is currently serving his sentence at RMSI in Nashville, TN. He wrote to the Polk County News asking for his memoir to be shared with the people of Polk County.

Stewart asks that his testimony be dedicated to the victim's family. "I can't ever undo what has happened, but I try to live my life in a way that I try to give back daily! So I hope that will give each of them peace, but I ask each of them to forgive me for I am truly sorry for the event that took place," said Stewart.

Redeemed - Sinner to Son of God

John 1:12

Testimony & Memoir of Mike Stewart

My name is Mike Stewart. I am from Polk County, Tennessee. I would like to say that when I was there, I added value of sorts to my community, but as a lost man, I lived a life that is typical of most that are lost there and could say, probably even worse.

My past was from one brokenness to another. Parents that thought a roof and a meal were the values given to children. My dad was an alcoholic, and mom was on nerve medications. Dad needed alcohol to cope, and I never had to worry about food or a dry place to sleep, but all the values a young child needs such as love, integrity, and discipline were not taught to me. However, I learned them.

Every child wants his parents' approval. But when everything you do that is positive fails to earn this it leaves you finding other ways to get attention, negative attention usually.

I was introduced to moonshine and beer at the age of 10 or 11 years of age. I began to sneak into my dad's supply of alcohol and by the age of 13, I contracted alcohol poisoning from drinking so much that I had to have my stomach pumped. For me, there were NO CONSEQUENCES from

my parents. So that led me to think that my behavior was acceptable. Thus, from the age of 13, there was no Jesus, no real love, compassion, nor guidance! By NO MEANS am I blaming my outcome on my parents. They showed me love, the only type they knew, worldly love. I chose the paths in life that have brought me to my current position in life.

Now I did have a Grandad that lived up north and he would come down twice a year. He was a man that I respected. Retired from a company and having been in the military, he always told me that I was valuable. I always brushed this off as, "I'm his first grandson so he is just being nice." But later in life, I'd see that he was speaking life to me.

My Rebellion

My Grandad passed away when I was 13 years old and my life was turned upside down. After this, I rebelled in every sense of the word; which, with the help of my older half-brother, became very easy. I was using LSD at age 13 and drinking every weekend.

This was the making of a monster, and I didn't realize just how bad of one.

Now, fast forward to the age of 18. Drugs and drinking had led me to county jail several times. I was learning if you had the right last name and lots of money you could escape the consequences of the things which I was guilty of. I began to develop no respect for authority, which led me to rebel even more.

At the age of 19 I was shot in the chest with a 9mm handgun at point blank range. My youngest brother and I, along with a friend, were out drinking and taking Valium, and let's say that trouble is always looking for disaster. I was shot in the chest, and when I turned to get in the car, I was shot in the back. I remember telling my brother that I was dying as he performed CPR on me.

Then, from nowhere, a lady showed up and the last thing I remember was her praying over me saying, **"IN THE NAME OF JESUS, no Satan you're not getting this one."**

I died there and was brought back to life by the EMTs and was air lifted to Erlanger hospital. While in route I died again, and again I was resuscitated. I would like to have an amazing experience to share about the moments of my being lifeless; however, the only thing that I remember was **BLACKNESS!**

They managed to patch me up and, yet despite my arrogance and pride at the time—I can see God's grace was there for this poor lost man.

By the time I was 20 years old, my life had taken a turn that added additional responsibilities to it other than the responsibility to myself. I had gotten married, which slowed my party life. With the birth of my daughter my responsibilities grew. Four years later another daughter was born to us. During this time, I tried to quit drinking and doing drugs, but I was doing it for the wrong reasons. I wasn't happy in trying to quit; therefore, my attitude became "why even try." This led me back into using. I met a dealer who sold drugs to me for a little of nothing which I, in turn, sold for triple the cost. The devil has a way of dragging a person in, and what I thought was a blessing turned into a nightmare. I was used to an unlimited supply of drugs and the sense of power that came with it.

My mind was shot and my life was a wreck, but I couldn't see at the time. The dealer that supplied me ended up getting busted, which in turn cost me everything that I had made from selling drugs. I found myself in places I'd never have went to and kept me there longer than I wanted to stay.

At the age of 26, I was on the run from the law, charged with 2 kidnapping and 2 robbery charges. After a 3-week binge of alcohol and drugs, a murder charge was added to the list.

Still Lost

WOW! Still arrogant and prideful, I sat in jail and awaited trial. I decided to take a plea on the kidnappings so that I could go ahead and go to prison. I wasn't used to being locked up for long periods of time. I spent 9 months in a cell the size of a bathroom which nearly drove me crazy!

When I arrived in prison in 2003, I was angry, hurt, and full of all kinds of emotions. None of them were good. I soon met a guy who was part of a prison group called the "Aryan Nation." They ran a long line of stuff down to me, and wanting to fit in and be loved, I decided to become a part of them. I moved up the ranks of this gang, and after 2 years I found myself 3rd in charge across the entire state. I got to tell men what to do, and I remember a thought that I had when I had been given or earned this position....

"They wanted to lock me up, so now I'll give them the monster they asked for."

Drugs and money weren't hard to come by, and I had both. I went to [close custody] for a "call of duty" so to speak. I spent 18 months on [close] and got hooked up with other high-ranking members of other gangs and this led me to dealing drugs, I was transferred to another prison, and that's when my addictions became worse. I then started injecting drugs and taking pills as well as dealing to various groups within the prison. While at this prison, I went through a lot of drugs. I would get a large amount of one drug and sell or trade for the drugs of my choice.

I was once again transferred to a new prison, this being BCCX in Pikeville, Tennessee. My drug use was still going on, but I remember when the reality of being an addict came to mind. I realized that **I wasn't the one with power... The drugs were.**

I was sitting in my cell and had just got a large amount of drugs. I had two syringes; each filled with a different drug lying on my desk. I remember looking at them and realizing I couldn't resist shooting it into my body. I had to do it!

What many lost men in prison would love to have was lying in front of me and was literally driving me crazy. I remember praying as a lost man. Not for God to save me but **whatever it took to make me stop, please do it.**

Let me say please be mindful of your prayers because God will often do as you ask. Are you ready for an answer? At the time, I couldn't see anything happening, but looking back, I see more clearly.

I recall shooting up, and then a church call would come out, and I would run to it. I would sit on the front row and vibrate from being so high. For 6 months, day after day this went on. I got caught with a cell phone and conspiring to violate TDOC rules for introducing drugs into prison.

They had no drugs, no recorded phone calls and nothing linking me to the violation. However, God has a way of doing things, and the prayer that I prayed 6 months earlier was getting answered.

Christ Found Me

I spent 50 days in solitary confinement or as prisoners call it "the hole," Unit 7/Cell 25. When the door closed behind me: I slid down it and cried out, **"What do you want from me, LORD?"** God brought the thought to me, **"If I served Him half of what I served Satan. He would use me."** I remember thinking to myself, "half?" How can you use me when I'm addicted to all the drugs I use? He said, **"That's not who you are!"**

From that moment on, I was no longer high on any of the drugs I had used for so long. But, I was high on Jesus, and I have yet to come down! I should have been sick for days, yet I never was...not even one time.

REDEEMED! November 8, 2010. *Romans 10:9-10, 13* Over the next 50 days, I spent time reading and soaking up God's word. I remember the first verse that meant so much then and still to this day influences me: *2 Corinthians 5:17*, **"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, old things pass away and behold all things become new."** Powerful!

What I did not know was how to be a "new" man.

As I read and learned of justification, sanctification, and being covered in righteousness, a beautiful verse came to me and confirmed who I was! It was *2 Corinthians 5:21*, **"For he made him, who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God, Himself!"**

The book of Acts tells us to put actions to our faith by empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

As I read God's word, I saw that He used ordinary people with little in the way of education, political clout or prestige, but those who chose to act according to the measure of faith God gives all people. My faith is built and strengthened by Christ! I know that in myself there is no good thing, but only in the Holy Spirit that dwells in me is there hope and any good thing. *Romans 7:18*

In this Spirit is **grace, love, hope, and strength** and those are to be actions directed toward all who are lost and undone. When I left "the hole" I knew that God had given me an opportunity and position in a program called "Therapeutic Community" as a mentor. Who better than an ex-drug addict?

At first, I was questioned a lot by my boss who was lost. But after he saw the genuine love and concern God had given me for broken men. He called me into his office and told me that even though he had set me up a few times, I didn't fail. He told me that he had met two other people that were confessing Christians that he knew were true believers. And he asked me to pray for his mom that had been hurt, a son that was addicted to drugs, and for himself.

Two years into my change and new life, a devout AA/NA man asked me to go to his meeting on Fridays to help others to know what helped me change my life. I remember him saying that between AA/NA where men bond together, and with Jesus, men could get help. I said to him with a smile and I tell it even to this day, that AA/NA can help a lot of men, but I've never known one man

that didn't need Jesus. I could go on and on with testimonies of God's mercy, grace, and favor in my life here in prison, but I want to talk about this one.

My New Life in Jesus

As of 2026 I became a CPRS (Certified Peer Recovery Specialist). Helping men with past traumas and sharing the hope of a relationship that Jesus brings. The Lord has blessed me with a beautiful wife named Megan who shares the same excitement about Jesus. She is my partner, my best friend and she keeps me moving toward Christ. We look forward to the ministry the Lord has in store for us. We are blessed with 2 sons, 2 daughters, and grandchildren. The Lord has given us a church family and has opened many doors in our life for ministry. God's word declares in *Proverbs 29:18*, "that the people perish where there is no vision." Do you have a vision in your life?

Our Vision: Open a mission/sober living in McMinnville, TN as a place of refuge for the lost and broken.

We would like to open a place where if you are homeless, you have a home. If you are hungry, you have a place to eat. If you are without clothes, you can get something to wear. And most of all, if you are without hope, you can find it with us sharing The Gospel and good Christian counseling. There is a huge need in every small town across this country! And it seems as if people want to pass the problem on to someone else. We, as Christ's body, are commanded to help.

We all meet in our nice buildings and are excited about seeing each other. But here are a few questions:

What about the drug addict that is asking for help? Will he get it from your church?

What about the homeless? Will they see compassion from us?

What about our children that are not being led to, or by, God's word? We say we love them, but do our actions back up our words? Will we take time to listen to their silly conversations and just be a part of their lives? Will we make time for them and when we see them making mistakes give them Godly instruction? Take it from a man whose parents were too busy for him. When the world came along with all of its sin. I grabbed onto it, and it became my family.

Is this what we want for our next generation? Convicted criminals? Drug addicts? Gang members? Or some horrible statistics?

Again, I ask you, what is your vision? God's word is clear. He tells us to go to the ends of the world preaching The Gospel and making disciples. **To the ends of the world!**

In the Gospel of *Matthew Chapter 22* there is a call given by a king. When the chosen of the king wouldn't come, he sent his servants into the highways, meaning all the community, and invited everyone! The only requirement was that you put on Jesus! We as the church need to share Jesus with everyone. But, not only that, we are also able to make disciples of those that we lead to Christ.

We need to teach men and women the promises of God's Word and the love of God! So, men can be true husbands, dads, and Godly leaders of their homes, and so moms can be true wives

and mothers, providing for their children, and nurturing in an environment that teaches their children to love and respect God. Respect is often learned from dads while love is often learned by moms loving their children. It is important to teach men and women how to live out God's word so they can pass it on (*2 Timothy 2:2*).

I hope my testimony of God's love, His Amazing Grace, and His hope encourage all of you to grow the vision God has given to you to see God as He truly is. He changed a man like me and has given me a new name and a new life!

May each of you grow and prosper in the Lord Jesus Christ! Praise be to God for all that he has done!

-MIKE STEWART