

Mind Unbroken

MICAH'S TESTIMONY

AN INNOCENT LIFE LOST

In 2007, six months before I, Micah Johnson took someone's life, my father took me to Baptist Hospital in Knoxville during a mental breakdown only days after an altercation outside of Calculus III class at the University of Tennessee. I had met the Dean, was suspended, told to seek treatment in order to return to the Aerospace Engineering program at UT, but my mind and world began collapsing.

Baptist hospital documented my hallucinations, and delusions, and drugs were ruled out as a cause for the psychosis.

Baptist released me from the hospital against medical advice (AMA) while I was still psychotic. Yet, my father sought additional treatment for me at Peninsula Health, St. Mary's Hospital, and finally a small clinic called Better Brain Technologies.

In early Feb. 2008, 5 weeks before the murder, I complained to an Advanced Psychiatric Nurse (APN) at Better Brain Technologies that I was feeling tired.

The APN made a drastic medication change and lowered my antipsychotic Zyprexa from the highest to the lowest possible dose and added the antidepressant Zoloft.

Prior to the February 2008 meeting, except for the altercation at UT, there was nothing in my record that indicated any suicidal / homicidal ideation, or violent thoughts.

On March 19m 2008, I took the life of Carrie Daugherty. The same person who organized my birthday and baked my birthday cake on March 6th, 2008. Carrie was an innocent and caring person who had recognized my mental illness early on.

SEEKING REDEMPTION

It is the most painful thing I have ever experienced knowing that I took an innocent person's life, yet it cannot compare to the pain I have caused Carrie's family and friends.

I am seeking redemption in the eyes of the world, and I will continue doing good, loving my family, and trying to make amends in this world for the wrong I have done. Simply because it is the right thing to do.

I have never denied my crime; I have accepted that I must serve time and have held myself responsible for my mental health and treatment for the last 18 years.

Yet, only through God's love and his son Jesus' sacrifice can I seek true redemption. Through prison ministry on maximum security at Knox County Jail, I felt the first signs of God's Love.

CHAPLAIN REYES

Chaplain Robert Reyes would come visit us in Knox County back in 2010. I would often listen to him speaking to others from behind the steel door to my single-man cell. We all spent 23 hours per day locked down, but for one hour of recreation, we would be able to come out shackled and handcuffed to shuffle around the pod, make a fifteen-minute phone call to family, and take a shower.

I found hope in Chaplain Reyes. I was suffering from mental illness symptoms and constant stress. Fighting the onset of mental crisis.

Chaplain Reyes took the time to talk, listen, and pray with me. One day, he asked that I read and memorize 1 Corinthians' chapter 13. And he would come back next week to see if I could.

I read and memorized chapter 13 and as I sat repeating the words. The power of God and the secret to a life with him and Jesus condensed down to one word: **Love**.

1 Corinthians 13:2-7 - If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It was in the lowest point of my life that God taught me to love myself, love my family, and love the path that I was on and trust his **Love and hopefully Mercy**.

After repeated visits by Chaplain Reyes, prayer and communication and visits with my family and friends, I began to make a recovery and seek healing from the Great Healer: Jesus.

THE ROAD TO JESUS

My road to Jesus was not easy. My trial was coming up and my faith in God and my understanding of His ways were young and immature. It took my breath when I received a life sentence. When at 24-yearsold you are told you have Life with Parole but have to wait 110 years before being parole eligible, it takes everything you have inside you to not lose hope. I did not lash out violently, and did not take it out on others, but I looked at a system that had condemned me to die and turned away from Jesus instead of toward him at first.

I thought the system was broken. I thought that this gave me the right to disrespect rules and laws, and I chose to live down to the reputation of criminal that I felt I was to be forever, instead of living up to being one of God's creations. Under His law, His justice, His grace and mercy.

In the first months I was written up for knives, I made whiskey, jumped interior fences for tobacco and cell phones, possessed drugs, had cellphones, and trained myself every day for the next 7 years to live or to die in prison.

THE MAN IN THE WHEELCHAIR

On a trip back to Knox County from West Tennessee during my appeal process I met another man that held a small service. It had been a year or two since I had gone to a service, but something called me that day.

The pastor was a man in a wheelchair, and you could see he was in pain by the way he spoke, but his sense of humor captured my attention.

"Churches call me to speak," he said smiling, "then, when they hear what I have to say, they don't call me back again!"

"That is because I tell them I am non-denominational, some argue that by not subscribing to their denomination I'm not even Christian."

"But I tell them I am a follower of Jesus' words and teachings. What I try to explain before they throw me out is this: "If we as followers of Jesus follow in his footsteps and try to live by his words, there is no need to name anything, just speak his name." He continued, "There is no need for division, for condemnation, nor judgment. There is only a mandate for Love and Mercy for all those who seek the Lord and love Jesus with all their heart."

The way this man explained Jesus to me connected on the simplest of levels. I had been avoiding different services because of arguments and divisions. This time when I picked up the Bible, as I had done years ago, was 1 now turned TOWARD the words written in red. Jesus' words of mercy and love.

MERCY AND LOVE

What I had needed to give AND searched for these many years! ... Love and Mercy. It was around 2021 that I gave up a life of rule breaking. I started growing gardens for the prison. I became an institutional artist painting works for Men of Valor and charity organizations and began seeing the impact I could have on people who had lost hope just like myself. Looking at sentences that seemed hopeless.

In 2022, my appeal was granted. I was released for 10 months and told to prepare for a new trial. I met and married my wife Leslie whom I had known since middle school, and we now have a two-year-old daughter together.

During my 10 months free, I was perfect working with pretrial release. I was blessed and entrusted by Men of Valor to fix the rooms for the men at the new campus that opened up in Knoxville. I started my own home repair business and got to spend much needed time with my mother who passed away this year in March 2026.

I had a feeling God was not through with me, but I had chosen to follow Jesus and stood before the court for my second trial. I received the same life sentence. The same 110 years!

This time, I turned toward Jesus.

I went to HCCF and began teaching students in the GED program there. I had earned my Associate's Degree from Nashville State Community College during my previous incarceration, and now I am at RMSI attending Lipscomb University and plan to graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in 2027.

In addition, I work in the Braille Program and transcribe books for Tennessee School for the Blind; and am certified by the Library of Congress in Braille Transcription as of 2026.

MY PRAYER

My first thoughts and prayers are with my victim's family. I pray for their health and peace. I cannot imagine the pain they feel, and I would rather have died than taken their daughter from this world.

I thank God and pray every day for the Lord's healing and my family. I do not know my fate, but I know that God has been watching over me these many years in prison. Jesus has saved my life and allowed me to save the lives of others. I want nothing in life but to hold my daughter and wife, and we want to educate people about mental health so others can recognize the signs, dangers, save lives, and prevent tragedy related to mental illness.

Jesus has taught me how to dedicate my life to showing kindness and mercy to others and being a man of peace. For my wife and daughter's sake, **I seek my own freedom at the crossroads where justice and mercy meet.** I will never give up pursuing God's love, my family's love and embrace, and being the best husband and father I can, and seeking redemption in my life.

I pray that anyone who reads this finds mercy and love in their hearts and is willing to **find crossroads of justice and mercy for others.**

I want to thank the **Matthew 25 Initiative** for the opportunity to share my path to Jesus and hope others can do the same for their families, their communities, and to bring more souls to the Lord through his son Jesus Christ.

I am inspired by many men inside and out who have dedicated themselves to being Drug-Free and Non-Violent over decades of incarceration. Society needs incarceration to correct and reform behavior; but, after that correction, society needs Men and Women who walk with Jesus and share his message back in this world to teach the next generation about God's Love and Mercy.