

## **Douglas, come forth!**

5-24-07

***And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. (Isaiah 62:2)***

*“<sup>24</sup> And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. <sup>25</sup> And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup> And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. <sup>27</sup> And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. <sup>28</sup> And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob ...” Gen 32:24-28 (KJV)*

Here I sit meditating on God's word. I am currently incarcerated in the Gwinnett County Detection Center for a DUI offense I received back in 1996. In January of the following year I was convicted of it and sentenced to one year probation, 40 hours of community services, 15 days work release, and a \$995.00 fine. In addition, I was required to enroll in a DUI school and another program involving risk management of some kind. Unable to meet the requirements of my sentence due to a lack of transportation, I defaulted on it and was subsequently picked up in October of that year by a Gwinnett county deputy at my job for violation of probation. At the probation hearing I was reinstated but required to report to my probation officer that week, and to pay the full balance of \$995.00 on my next pay day. I paid a friend of mine \$15.00 to take me to Gwinnett from Atlanta to see the probation officer, and this would be the only way I would be getting up there anyway. After our meeting was over, I was a nervous wreck. He had been very successful in putting the fear of God in me, as far as what he would do if I did not comply with the terms of the probation. I was to report to him on a weekly basis until the fine had been paid off ... period. Well, since the incident had caused me to lose my job, I saw no reason to give them all the money I would be getting from my next - and last - check. After all, I had to have somewhere to live until I got another job thank you. I felt boxed in without any fighting way out of that mess so I did the next best thing available in my fight or flight primal nature. I took flight. I decided it was in my best interest to leave Atlanta and return to Seattle until I could put some money together and come back and resolve this matter. Well, I finally came back to Atlanta in July of 2006, ten years later, but was still in no position to satisfy the requirements of the fine. There was also the matter of the outstanding warrant for probation violation, and take care of any other requirements. After speaking with several attorneys about my situation, whose chargers ranged from \$1000.00 to \$2,500.00, I was told by each that although I would be turning myself in, the courts would not likely reward me for this action.

I was further told that there was no way I could get out of going to jail until my probation was resolved. Technically, this could take up to 30 days, even before I got a hearing. Then, there was the matter of whether they would violate my probation, reinstate it, or vacate the probation under the conditions I serve a specified length of time in jail. The latter would also release me from all fines and other requirements imposed at my initial sentencing. This was indeed a risky proposition, in which each attorney told me they could promise nothing. Since I was gainfully employed at the time, and definitely was in no position to take an unknown length of time off work, I decided to take my chances and simply put off turning myself in until a later time when hopefully my circumstances were more favorable, and my job situation less fragile. Unfortunately, those ideal scenarios would avail themselves to me sooner than I thought. My contract ended prematurely regarding my job. After that, my savings quickly dwindled because I had earlier dipped in to them to purchase a car I paid for in cash. Soon after that I secured a loan against the title of the car but neglected to listen carefully to the terms of the agreement or read the legal contract given to me. For some reason I was stuck on the idea that the loan was for 90 days, just like it is at a regular pawn shop. Needless to say, this would be my undoing. After about a month and a half of constantly trying to come up with gas money, food money, and rent money, my worst fears were realized. I think it safe to say that had I rented a voicemail account, or had not lost my cell phone and refusing to purchase a third one, I would have not found myself in the dire position that was unfolding before me.

Ironically, on the very day of my birthday, a special day for everyone where we expect to be showered with gifts and pampered with special treatment, my day started out with my car being impounded for defaulting on my car title loan. After witnessing the absence of my car, and staring incredulously at the skid marks left behind as a result of the tow truck having to physically pull the car out of the drive way, I breathlessly sighed in horror and disbelief. How could this be, I asked myself, how could this be? I quickly walked back into my apartment for fear of breaking down into tears in front of the neighbors. I just made it into the house before tearing up and feeling weak in the knees. Sensing all hope was lost, I suddenly found a thread of hope regarding the terms of the loan agreement – at least my perceived notion of what the agreement entailed, or should have entailed. Again, the idea of the loan maturing after 90 days gave me a false sense of hope. Maybe my car was impounded by mistake, I thought, and the matter simply needs to be cleared up. First, I would look for the contract to make sure. After clutching the contract in hand, and for once reading the true terms of the agreement, I felt dumbstruck and harshly admonished myself for again being so irresponsible in legal matters like this. I absolutely had no excuse! It was spelled out, in no uncertain terms, that the loan was payable in full in 30 days. A grace period of an additional 30 days was imposed should I was to redeem the car in the event the car was impounded. That meant they were certainly within their rights to impound my car after 30 days and keep it an additional 30 days in lieu of payment. I was heartbroken, and immediately pierced in my mind by the notion of turning myself in to the police because of my outstanding warrant. After all, how was I going to come up with the money in 2 weeks to get my car back.

The only place I knew where I could seek work immediately was at the day label center I had already been going to and all it was good for was helping me to buy food, gas, and

maybe have ten or twenty dollars to give to the rent man. Without the use of a car, I wouldn't be able to get to the center in time to go out on an assignment. Now that I was in no position to really help myself financially, I could only see turning myself in as the only way out. I had absolutely nothing else to lose! At least this way I wouldn't go hungry or be out in the streets. I could finally face my legal responsibilities instead of running from them, which had been a constant drain on my mental and emotional wellbeing. Whenever a police car pulled behind me, I would almost be overwhelmed with fear, and my heart would start beating rapidly as if I was going to have a coronary arrest. I would end up a bundle of nerves. I mean a nervous wreck. I simply couldn't continue like that. Now, at least, I could rid myself of it once and for all. I could also use the time to strengthen my relationship with God. I needed to use that time to get as close to God as I could and come out of jail with the blind faith I would need to re-establish my life based on a true God-centered existence. These thoughts sped through my mind for a few fleeting seconds and then began to form the foundation of my resolve to face my uncertain future regarding my warrant. I knew I had to step out on faith and trust that God would see me through this ordeal. I had to give wings to my faith and soar into the unknown void of my future, guided only by God's love, his spirit, and his purpose for my life. In my mind and in my heart, the matter was settled.

Since this was the weekend, I decided to stay home until Monday and then contact the police later that evening, taking the first step to a brand new me. This would be no small feat for me because for anyone going to prison it inherently involves taking some considerable risks regardless of how long you are there. There is an unknown aspect to it that creates a deep sense of uncertainty about the possibility of ever getting out, especially getting out at the prescribed time. For me to turn myself in voluntarily like this takes a tremendous amount of faith in God because it involves dealing with situations that can easily spiral out of control if I don't do the right thing. Unless I can completely humble myself and keep my eyes stayed on Jesus, I could very easily lose my control if I'm unnecessarily challenged or disrespected. To a point, I could turn the other cheek but it's after that point that concerns me, and rightfully so because I run the risk of never leaving prison, or leaving at a much later date than I should.

At the writing of this entry, I am in my 3<sup>rd</sup> day of fasting. Through God's grace, I am able to make good on my promise to get closer to him and begin the building process to a brand new me. God has also been merciful towards me by having the courts show me favor. After being away for ten years, the courts imposed on me a two month jail confinement which was cut in half because of the 2 for 1 day county jail policy. This meant that technically I was supposed to get released on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June. However, after requesting my release date several days later, I was told that my official release date was on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. To God be all the glory! I don't know how this happen to equate this way but I intend to walk by faith and not by sight. God is good! In addition to my jail time, the judge allowed me to pay a reduced fine amount of \$200.00 which would grant me an immediate release from jail, and would nullify my probation and any other of the initial court-ordered requirements imposed during my sentencing. This was indeed unexpected, and had I still been working, would not have caused me to jeopardize my job. I had turned myself in on a Monday evening, as planned, and had been fortunate enough to come to my probation hearing on that following Friday. That would have meant missing four days from work, which would have been

manageable. However, there existed the uncertainty of when I would be going to the hearing and, as I mentioned, could be anywhere from 1 week to 30 days. It was this uncertainty that the attorneys had absolutely no control over. The hearing was totally at the discretion of the probation office. Never the less, I thanked God for this goodness, and for giving me the opportunity to start a new life. Yes, a new life raised from the dead.

A life that is absent of the old nature that came here to jail with me when I turned myself in. You might say that I took the initiative to get back on the Potter's wheel for Him to continue to shape me and form me into the likeness of Christ. In my own way, I have volunteered to enter into the flaming furnace to be tried so that I can come forth as pure gold, with the dross of my afflictions removed, the wrappings of the dead man's clothes that bound me loosed, and me set free. This

I sometimes jokingly amuse myself with the idea that I am actually here to commit a murder. In a real sense, I am. I am here to crucify my old nature, once and for all. Admittedly, he has been a worthy foe, but his time is limited. Before I am released from jail I intend to snuff the very life out of him by crucifying him to the imaginary cross I have prepared for him the dark recesses of my jail cell, where he shall remain for the rest of my life here on this earth. Upon my release, let it be proclaimed that this county jail has unwittingly participated in releasing a detainee that for all intents and purposes has committed the singular act of murder against his old nature, and has effectively sentenced his old nature to an eternity behind the bars of the GCDC. It is for this very reason that I am compelled to fast and pray for a substantial time in hope of achieving my objective – to crucify my old nature. For the most part, I start my day with a cup of coffee just to get the mental stamina and acumen I need to tirelessly search the scriptures and involve myself in prayer and meditation. The only other liquid I consume is water, faucet water. I have currently been in jail for 11 days and I have 9 days and a wake up to go. Some may ask why I am still in jail if I only have to pay \$200.00 to be release from my seemingly harsh ordeal. Personally, I don't have the money, but if I were to contact certain friends and relatives of mine, I'm sure I could come up with it. Unfortunately, this would defeat the purpose of my wanting to turn myself in. You see, not turning myself in was never really an option for me, and getting back on my feet by my own strength was not spiritually profitable.

What I really needed to do was seek refuge in the so that I could be ministered to, comforted, shaped and formed, and most of all, freed from my old nature. Going to jail, to me, began to offer the best way of doing this. I would simply be checking into a spiritual health facility that would cater to my practical needs while giving me the opportunity to dispense the necessary balm for my spiritual needs. In the context of this arrangement I no longer see myself as a prisoner, but as a patient, a patient who desperately wants to get well. Ironically, before I came in here, it was then that I was a prisoner, a prisoner to my old nature. Only through the wisdom of God can one obtain real freedom even from the dismal environment of a jail cell. In the framework of God's wisdom I am being liberated, being renewed, being reborn. Even in the confines of a jail cell I am establishing the foundation for living to my full potential. I am renewing my commitment of surrendering to God's purpose for my life. I am taking the first of many steps to secure God's blessing for my life, and to take back everything that the enemy has taken from me. I am also re-enlisting into God's spiritual army to fulfill my obligation as a soldier, and as a servant. I think it safe to

say that the benefits I reap from the confines of this dreary cell far outweigh the temporary punishment imposed by the courts intended to restrict my physical movement. Under the circumstances, I believe if the courts knew that what they considered a punishment was effectively going to be a blessing, they may have opted to free me instead and subject me to the real punishment of being imprisoned by my old nature. Now I understand the full meaning of the scripture that relates how our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "... having spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

I'm sure that if the powers that be back then had realized they would be party to the fulfilling of scripture, and the glorification of the risen Christ, they would no doubt have set him free. To me, this kind of twisted reality really drives home the biblical declaration that states that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways. I will venture to say that choosing to walk by faith instead of living on the basis of feelings, opinions, and logic often means being misunderstood. Our actions may appear unreasonable to the outside world (and sometimes even to ourselves), but what could be more reasonable than allowing our omnipotent Father to guide us? When we, like Moses, find our talents and abilities are no match for the task at hand, God's power will accomplish through us what needs to be done (2Cor12:9). The Lord isn't always "reasonable" as we interpret reason, but he works out our circumstances through our obedient actions. We can be confident that he who used a shepherd to challenge a Pharaoh is trustworthy. Living by faith requires releasing our human sense of what is best and reasonable in order to rely wholly on God – it involves obeying when the Lord indicates we are to speak or act. God wants us to trust he has a plan for our life and is constantly directing circumstances and maneuvering people to ensure that his purpose is achieved. Whatever the challenge, you can be successful by choosing to depend entirely upon God. He will stand you up before your personal Egypt and make you victorious. It all makes so much sense when we look at our circumstances through scripture instead of through our senses. A lot of the inmates here marvel at the sense of peace I display, and even more when I tell them it's a blessing for me to be here. Most of them have great difficulty in adequately processing my state of being because it clashes with their perception of rational thinking. I think that secretly they long to have my peace of mind but sometimes they are over-come by the desire to make sport of me or to avoid me as being someone out of touch with reality.

Personally, I don't mind them giving me some space because they tend to be the guys that I need to stay away from anyway. They're actually doing me a favor and making it possible for others to see me more clearly without the obstructions of negativity crowding all around me. It allows my light to shine clearer and brighter for those seeking a safe haven on the shores of a tempestuous sea of personal failure or tragedy. I want them to know there is someone, even in here, whose light is being supplied by the one who is the "Light of the world". I am constantly flashing my beacon of light into this sea of lost and wayward souls in hopes that some may be rescued by me or the reflection of Christ I try to project, and brought to the healing and nourishing power of Jesus Christ. In doing this, I am delighted to say that God has indeed been using me to do just that since I've been in here. God is working mighty through me and I feel so honored to be an active participant in the advancement of his kingdom. I recall reading the scripture, "... and it was noised that he was in the house." (Mark 2:1) and thinking that if I was truly reflecting the character of

Jesus then I shouldn't have to tell anyone that I was a believer because my conduct should speak for me and, in effect, noise it all through the pod that a man of God is in the house. Not only should inmates be able to see that my behavior is different than anyone else's, but a chosen few of them should be able to see the Christ in me and gravitate toward me. To my great delight and amazement, that's exactly what is happening. I am tending to repel the guys that don't really know Jesus, and attracting the few that do know him, or want to know him.

The really cool thing about this is that it's being done without me having to talk a good talk. I'm simply walking the walk, and it's a lot nosier than if I was only talking a good game. I imagine that when Jesus was in that house he didn't have to say a word because his reputation, based on the way he lived his life, had already preceded him and done the talking for him. Although the harvest of lost or battered souls is plentiful, the workers are few. There are guys in here, however, that talk about Jesus as though they really know him but their witness is made ineffective because their light is so obscured by the dark behavior they tend to exhibit. As is in here, professors of Jesus Christ who openly engage in the practice of profanity, cigarette smoking, lewd behavior, and show a lack of self control do more to darken Jesus' light and in the process send a false ray of hope to those in need of help, resulting in people needlessly crashing on the rocks of despair in a raging and perilous sea of uncertainty and doubt. Admittedly, some in here forsake the light of Christ in favor of the light of camaraderie and the false hope of belonging. To them the need to belong to a group, regardless of the group's behavioral short-comings, far outweighs the prospect of existing in jail without the presumed security and protection of such groups. Yes, I see a lot of guys in here professing Christ and attending prayer group and church service but they misrepresent Christ, and they produce no noticeable fruit. They simply encourage others to think that God is OK with their behavior and further promote its use. It seems as though these guys take great pride in the liberty they have being saved by grace and don't seem to understand the part they should be playing witnessing to an unsaved and hurting world. We need to understand that we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. We are his agents, his representatives.

It's been said that we are the only bible some people will ever read. When we have been identified by others as being believers, we have a responsibility to ourselves, and to Jesus to make sure that we represent his gospel the way the bible intends. When we don't do this in here, we distort, misrepresent, and make impotent the gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead of us truly drawing others to the safe shores of Christ, we tend to help those who are lost or drowning in this turbulent sea to draw others who are lost and drowning themselves. Jesus should be an individual's personal Lord and Savior, not the group's Lord and Savior based on the particular weaknesses of the group. Just because you become a member of a group and the group uses profanity and their behavior is indistinguishable from that of unsaved people, it shouldn't give a believer the right to behave as such. We are singularly called to represent Jesus independently of any group. After all, we alone will have to stand before God and give an account for the life we live. God isn't going to want to hear excuses like, "Everybody else did it so what's wrong with me doing it?" We will be judged independently of anybody else. It is my hope, however, that maybe if I can show them an example of the character of Jesus as best I can, I can take an even more active part in advancing God's

kingdom. I look forward to it. I came off my fasting period after 4 days because I started to notice a definite decrease in my body's ability to regulate my body temperature.

These jail cells are purposely designed to maintain a constant temperature of around 68 degrees. A regular diet of the prison food not only fuels the body but as a result of the digestion process, the body generates enough heat to offset some of the ambient coolness. With me not eating and solid food, I'm sure contributed to my susceptibility to a decrease in body temperature. The last thing I needed to subject myself to in here was any kind of illness. This was not an option. I, therefore, accepted this sudden coolness in the air as a gentle, but timely, tug from God indicating that my period of fasting was sufficient to him, and that my goal of crucifying my old nature had been achieved. I was ecstatic about the whole thing and felt a godly peace envelope me as if to offer me additional confirmation that God was well pleased with me. To punctuate this period of fasting, God even provided me the awesome opportunity of bringing another soul to Jesus Christ. I was so full of joy and simply overwhelmed by the move of God here in this jail cell. Presently, since I've been here, the Lord has used me to minister to a guy who needed to recommit himself to the Lord and strengthen his faith. The other was the one mentioned earlier where I helped a brother receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. I dare to say that these blessings alone more than justify my reason for being here. I'm quickly learning that being here is not only about me. I'm learning that developing my spiritual self and being about the Lord's business are one and the same, meaning I cannot have one without the other.

I was contacted by the day shift deputy this morning and asked if I would like to spend my last week in the working pod. This is a section of the GCDC that houses inmates that help to keep this facility running. Normally, there exists a lot of freedom to physically move around, and the perks can be considerable, depending on your work assignment. From what I've been told, you're fed much better, have more free time to remain outside of your cell, and aren't subjected to the normal harsh and provocative bellowing of the shift deputies. I'm sure this sounds like something I should have jumped at, and I think it safe to say that probably 99 percent of these inmates would have. However, I immediately declined the offer because I knew it would not allow me to produce the fruit comparable to my current housing arrangement. After all, as I stated, it's not about me. The worker pods are typically for low risk inmates with very little time left to do here, and who tend to embrace the prospect of their freedom from jail more than the promise of true freedom offered by Christ. I simply want to be where I can be of the most help, in spite of the circumstances because I am here of my own accord, with my own agenda, with my own sense of liberty and freedom. I must be about my Father's business. The pod that I'm in is one of the many intake pods where detainees are rushed into this place with a whole lot of hurt, confusion, anger, and despair. It is these inmates that constitute the harvest of lost and drowning souls to be rescued. After voicing my decline of the work pod transfer within earshot of some of the inmates, I was later asked why I had refused such a "lucrative" opportunity. Without telling them my real reasons, I offered the time-honored excuse of simply not wanting to work for the prison establishment. Invariably, this response would diffuse any additional questions intended to put me on the spot by further exposing and amplifying my so-called irrational, if not illogical, thinking. With the utmost confidence, I stand by my decision.

Later that morning there came a new addition to my jail cell. My hopes are high that this could be another opportunity to preach the gospel, for as Paul states in 1 cor9:16, "... woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" However, it is quickly becoming apparently to me that I could be in for a very spiritually trying experience. This is because the spiritual balance that existed between my previous cell mates and me has been disrupted, if only momentarily, by the change of new cell mates. Now I am forced to exist in the cell as a kind of "odd man out", where the other 2 of my cell mates are around 30 years younger than I am, and are card-carrying active participants of the hip-hop, gansta rap, and drug culture. Were it not for the fact that for 8.5 hours per day I am a captive audience to my cell mates and am at times subjected to some of the most vile and disturbing profanity and negativity that seems to vex my spirit, it would not be this much of a problem. I constantly struggle to come to grips with why I am so sensitive to this kind of behavior and language, but all I know is that it just doesn't seem right for me to have to subject myself to it, especially when I'm supposed to have power and authority over it. It also disturbs me that many inmates here try to push vulgar and vile profanity to disgusting limits as though its viciousness adds stature to their physical frame, and in the process creates an illusion to others that they are dangerous, and not to be messed with. I think that this excessive use of profanity is merely a façade to conceal their true inner fears and insecurities, and that deep down inside they are very scared little boys. I am also constantly disturbed by how little the use of such language provokes in my cell mates a sense of shame when using this language around me when I am reading the bible or talking about the Lord. This behavior is also utilized by many inmates that profess the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior! If I didn't see them at prayer group or church service, I wouldn't know they were Christians because I see no other fruit produced. At times, I feel so utterly alone in this pod, trying to reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

I sometimes feel just as alone as Elijah did concerning being alone after the prophets of the Lord were killed as indicated by Rom 11:3,4, and he felt that he had been the only prophet left alive. Out of approximately 140 men in this pod, there has to be some one besides myself that is here not only talking the talk, but walking the walk. An interesting thing happened tonight during prayer call. This unauthorized gathering of inmates in our pod is not sanctioned by the GCDC, but is allowed by a few of the deputies. Normally, the meeting is headed by 2 or more inmates that feel that God has a calling on their lives to be preachers of the gospel and as authorities of scripture. For at least 6 months, as I have been told, there has never been any discord among the brethren that disrupted the flow of the meeting. However, I was actually delighted to see that this prayer call get-together had finally come to the attention of the enemy, and was now squarely, and prominently displayed on Satan's radar. The prayer meeting had come under spiritual attack. One of the preachers started preaching a sermon on walking what you talk and another preacher felt that God had given him the spirit of discernment to clearly see that he was the target of the other preacher's sermon. Instead of the offended preacher waiting until after the meeting ended, and then approaching the guy to further discuss the issue amongst themselves. The offended preachers decided to show his indignation right there during the other guy's sermon and the prayer meeting quickly began to show signs of collapse. Soon, they were each pointing a finger of judgment at the other while neglecting the plank that was in their

own eye. I immediately began to pray a silent prayer thanking God that our prayer call had been threatening enough to Satan to provoke a response from him in the form of this discord and then began to speak authority and dominion over this disruption in the name of Jesus.

The spiritual discord was soon diffused without there being any physical confrontation, and we ended the meeting with a prayer of victory and thanksgiving over the works of the devil. Afterwards, I discerned that this incident had actually been born out of the same troubling and disturbing behavior I had been witnessing from many of the so-called believers in the pod, including those that were leaders of the prayer meeting. Many times, Satan doesn't have to infuse the circumstances with evil or unrighteousness himself because we unwittingly, and sometimes shamelessly, provide it ourselves. When we profess to belong to Christ but then walk as though we belong to Satan we ourselves provide Satan with all the ammunition he needs to sow the seeds of discord. That's exactly why it should be imperative to believers to make sure they are not only talking the talk, but walking the walk by trying to live righteous and holy lives that are not being crippled by the indulgencies of profanity, smoking, lewd and lascivious behavior, and lack of self control. These things only provide Satan with more than enough weapons to undermine ones Christian witness and make a mockery out of the power and majesty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We absolutely must try to at least live our lives before others in a way that best represents the character of Christ. The bible says that discretion has its place. If, through our weakness of the flesh, we have to get in bed with Satan, we don't have to get in bed with him in front of others, if we can help it. Although this is not an excuse to sin, I think it is the lesser of the two evils because even though God is not being glorified, he is not being dishonored in the presence of others. When we openly and willingly get into bed with Satan in front of others, we sow the seeds of hypocrisy in the minds of others and the power of God to deliver and create in us a new mind in Christ is called into question by those who don't understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. I speak of those who think that once a person becomes saved they no longer have struggles with there flesh, or are tempted by the sinful nature. This lack of understanding on behalf of unbelievers is an invaluable snare the devil uses to keep them from seeking God through his son Jesus Christ. Whether we know it or not, our living is being read by others and placed alongside the gospel for comparison.

We should not be in fear of being judged by unbelievers but we are subject to admonishment and correction, in love, by other believers. I don' know if I want to be the one who provides this nudging but I will look for opportunities when I feel it is appropriate. This can indeed be a risky endeavor with many believers, but God doesn't need any coward soldiers. When I was first placed into population it was with a couple of young Black guys that, interestingly enough, professed to be saved through Christ Jesus. One was 19 and the other 26 but both acted way short of their respective ages, if you ask me. They were as rambunctious as any 12 year old and were a bit stir crazy due to being in this same cell for about 5 months, according to them. I sympathized with them though I still didn't feel that it justified their behavior. However, I was in for a rather rude awakening as I would begin to venture out into population. I would find out that their behavior was actually the norm. It would appear that after having spent all that time in the cell together they had some very interesting, though possessive, ideas about how we all would co-exist in this cell

... of theirs. It mainly came down to me having to exist in the cell living exclusively around the boundaries of their daily routines, meaning that if my body was some place that they wanted to be, it was I who had to oblige them. I tried over a couple of days to rationalize with them but it only made matters worse because their minds were already made up, and I was only confusing them with facts. Anyway, they didn't appear to be brothers in Christ after that and flatly stated that they didn't want me as a cell mate, as if they had any choice in the matter. The same day I asked the deputy if I could be assigned to a 2 man cell where I wouldn't be the third man sleeping on a mat on the floor, like I was. He agreed to assign me another cell and I, very unceremoniously, packed up and moved into my new cell without my old cellmates being aware of what I had done. When we did eventually walk pass each other outside our respective cells, we acted as though we had never be cellmates, which was rather unfortunate I thought.

I held no ill-will toward them but their behavior did disappoint me, and made it easier for me to keep them at arms-length. I found out that my new cell mate was a Black kid around 20 and was being held because of a robbery incident that happened while he was actually at work. One of his fellow employees had fingered him as being the inside man to the robbery. He was waiting for his lawyer to get his bond lowered to an amount his family could afford. He was from a middle-class home but had been a troubled kid until he decided to get away from the gansta rap crowd. While he had been in jail he had started to try to renew his faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We spent about 3 days together alone and were both making great progress in our desire to know Jesus better. Then, we got another cell young Black cell mate around 19 years old that came in reeking of the gansta rap life-style. This guy's use of profanity, vulgar language, and his uncontrollable urge to speak with violence and negativity coloring his every sentence was so overwhelming to me that I felt as though my very spirit were being vexed. I had never been so uncomfortable around that kind of language before, but neither had I been so much of a captive audience. I knew I was being deliberately attacked by the use of such language but I was not going to sit around and do nothing. I had come here to fast and pray, and I knew that now was the time to be doing just that. I felt that in order for me to make the most of my time in here, I had to create an environment that was conducive to what I need to accomplish. After all, why should I allow the powers of darkness to come in and take up residence in an area I have pleaded the blood of Jesus in, and have claimed it for the kingdom of God.

Satan has no authority here, and I have got to do whatever it takes to make sure that he never has. I must admit I have become quite a target on Satan's radar in here and he's taking notice of the way I am allowing the Lord to use me. Once, during the time of my fast, I had mistakenly taken my drinking cup outside into the yard area. After realizing it, I quickly jumped up from where I was sitting and dashed inside the door, not knowing I had spilled out some of the water that was in the bottom of it. I was mainly concerned about the deputy seeing me. Well, the deputy hadn't seen me but about 5 other guys swore that I had spit on the yard's cement ground, in stark defiance of the speech the deputy had made prior to letting us go outside into the yard area. After coming off the yard, I had gone up to my cell to pray and had been in there for maybe 4 or 5 minutes. The deputy loudly announced on the intercom that I was to immediately come down to his desk. Not knowing what was going on, I sheepishly went down the steps to his desk and was immediately gripped with

apprehension and pierced through by his cold beady eyes that were starring at me as if I had just slapped the warden. I was totally disarmed by the expressionless mask he regarded as a face. He asked me, coldly, if I had just come in from the yard, and I said, "No, not just now. " I said that I had been up in my cell for the last 4 or 5 minutes. Needless to say, the relativity of it all escaped me, and I thought he was referring to right then. He knew I had been out on the yard earlier and pounced on the opportunity to catch me in a lie. He then twisted my words around and said that I had denied being outside at all, in spite of my objections. I still didn't know what he was getting at but then he floored me when he blurted out proudly that I had been fingered by 5 guys who had seen me spit on the ground in the yard.

My mind reeled as I hit the fast reverse button of my mind's eye, frantically searching for the evidence I needed to refute these bogus charges. They were all grouped together laughing and jeering at me, pointing their fingers and at me, and making it crystal clear to me they were delighted that I had come under attack by the deputy. Seeing them closely grouped up that way brought to mind how scripture speaks of Satan bringing his false accusations against the brethren. Their gremlin-like behavior seemed to compose itself as one man, as they jockeyed for position to be at the fore-front of their venomous tirade. I looked away from them after capturing the faces of my ex-cellmates, and a couple of guys that I knew didn't like me, and proceeded to the yard. I pointed the deputy to the location and the spit had been found. I recoiled, exhaustively searching the cement ground for clues that would support my position but found none. I couldn't even make out my residual markings of the alleged spit that I was supposed to have deposited so I figured that someone had cleaned it up. How could I have spit on the ground without knowing it, I kept asking myself? After all, my mouth was bone-dry because this was my first 24 hour period of fasting. I don't think I could have produced any apt even if I wanted to so I meekly offered this deduction as the basis of my defense. This dramatic scene has gotten the attention of practically everyone in the pod whose cell was on the top floor, and who had decided to take advantage of the 2 hours of free time.

I could feel the heat beginning to build up in my brain as I quickly hit fast forward and backward in rapid succession in my memory while I quickly fast-forwarded and backward my memory and panning the zoom lens of my mind's eye trying to capture the closest detail of the area I had occupied just recently. The deputy kept twisting my words, threatening to put me in the hole, and getting me to declare that the 5 guys were liars. I coolly suggested that they were mistaken but he continued to try to intimidate and un-rattle me with his bullying questions. Turning around to start walking out with the deputy to the yard and show him where I had been sitting, I finally saw the 5 guys that had fingered me. They were all grouped together laughing and jeering at me, pointing their fingers at me, and making it crystal clear to me they were delighted that I had come under attack by the deputy. Seeing them closely grouped up that way brought to mind how scripture speaks of Satan bringing his false accusations against the brethren. Their gremlin-like behavior seemed to compose itself as one man, as they jockeyed for position to be at the forefront of their venomous tirade. I looked away from them after capturing the faces of my ex-cellmates, and a couple

of guys that I knew didn't like me, and proceeded to the yard. I pointed the deputy to the location and anxiously awaited his response. He said that it was the exact location the spit had been found. I recoiled, exhaustively searching the cement ground for clues that would support my position but found none.

I couldn't even make out any residual markings of the alleged spit that I was supposed to have deposited so I figured that some one had cleaned it up. How could I have spit on the ground without knowing it, I kept asking myself? After all, my mouth as bone-dry because this was my first 24 hour period of fasting. I don't think I could have produced any spit even if I waned to so I meekly offered this deduction as the basis of my defense. This dramatic scene had gotten the attention of practically everyone in the pod whose cell was on the top floor, and who had decided to take advantage of the 2 hours of free time. This meant that I was being eyed by some 75 men as an interruption to the normally scheduled broadcast on television that night. The searing eyes and the body heat generated from the closely grouped mass of humanity coiled about me like a snake, winding around me from every side, helming me in as though I were the prey. Dissatisfied, with my arcane excuse of a defense, the deputy reported the incident to a superior and asked what kind of punishment should be handed out for such an offence. Judging from the conversation, the likelihood that I would be going to the hole became imminent, as I braced myself for the worst. I was then told to go to my cell and pack my things but before I could reach my cell, I was called back down to once more face the inquisitive barking of the ex-military drill sergeant. Then, as if from out of nowhere, it hit me. I recalled that I myself had seen some liquid rush from my cup when I had hastily gotten up to come inside the pod before the deputy saw me outside with my cup.

That was it! The group of guys must have thought I had spit out something onto the ground and rushed to judgment about what it was. It had only been a trail of water, ejected from my cup. I humbly offered this possibility as exhibit B in my defense and to my great delight the deputy accepted it as a rational rebuttal, and a distinct possibility, effectively dismissing the charges against me. Once again God had come to my rescue, and the scripture of Jesus making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it, resounded through my mind. With the stately demeanor of a king who has seen his share of battles, I nonchalantly resumed my free time as though none of this dramatic and intense occurrence had ever happened. I washed the whole incident away, forgiving everyone of my accusers in the process. With the situation behind me, I looked forward to being about the Lord's business. Now, with only 2 days left before my release, I am still walking the fullness of Christ, and my relationship with him is better than ever. I have, for the most part, experienced peace and joy during my stay here, although the strain of being subjected to the amount of negative and unproductive behavior has been a constant challenge, I find it absolutely amazing that God has given me the power to diminish the amount of this behavior in my cell considerably. I would never have believed it possible when I first came here, but God has helped me to create and sustain an environment that would be conducive to my spiritual development in spite of the satanic forces that freely flow all around me.

It's as though God has spoken to this swirling concoction of a devilish storm the words, "Peace, be still ..." and provided me with a protective cocoon to focus on strengthening my

relationship with Jesus. The Lord has also been opening doors for me to minister to others through a variety of encounters, some of which only involves me reflecting the character of Christ for all to see. This rather passive display may not seem like much to most people unaccustomed to the subculture of prison life but I assure you that something as simple as this can have a power effect on the psyche of some inmates. Kids are more impacted by your behavior than by your talk, and it can encourage them to try to do the same. You also have to understand that most people have their perception of prison life shaped by either the mass media or by someone who, under most cases, will exaggerate the inherent dangers of prison in an attempt to glorify themselves. Most people returning from prison tend to capitalize on the wealth of gullibility held out by the desires of others to elevate those that shock their senses to an almost demigod status. Although in some extreme cases these horrors can exist but, in most cases, the truth of the matter is that most jails are not like that at all. Take the GCDC for instance.

This jail houses offenders mostly from the Gwinnett county area, where the racial mixture in here is Hispanic, Black, and White. Each of these groups comprises a subculture of their own and tend to exist in a vacuum. As far as Blacks are concerned, they almost exclusively come from middle to upper-middle class families where their biggest crime is being left to their own devices by their parents. Most of the Blacks in here with me come in the form of man-children ranging in age from 18 to 30 years of age but whom have never grown up to be men. Unfortunately, they have been hamstrung by the retarding nature of gangsta rap videos, weed, and the psychologically damning effects of group-think in a subculture that exalts negativity and shows utter contempt of all things positive. This, unfortunately, has thrived because of the absence of good Christian parental guidance, and been exacerbated by the record number of guilt-ridden, bleeding-heart, parents who are hell-bent on freeing their kids from any constraints, even if it ushers their kids into places like the GCDC in droves. These Black kids come here with the preconceived notion that unless they mob up with the group, they will be threatened by the dangers of their perception of prison life. Fortunately for the, they have been nourished by the vile and vulgar profanity associated with the gangsta rap subculture. They all enter the prison environment spewing out this language as if they actually exist on a world where this language is standard English. This language in itself becomes the calling card for admittance into such groups that exist to offer security and protection to the individual, and is also accompanied by outrageous and self-defeating behavior demonstrated by those seeking to be perceived as having jailhouse "hardness." Of course, all of this behavior is a façade to hide their inner fears but each one is totally convinced that this charade is absolutely necessary. Personally, I find their behavior detestable and offensive to everything Blacks in this country have strived and worked hard for.

They appear to be groups that are totally devoid of reason, logic, common sense, self-respect, and sense of decency. These pitiful attributes even trump the worst of the character exhibited by Whites or Hispanics groups. One of the central attributes I've noticed that is common to both White and Hispanic groups, but non-existent among the Black groups, is the outward show of respect to the elders of their race. Being a rather mature person myself, you might think me partial in this observation but the absence of this show of respect in the Black groups disturbs me deeply, and is not lost on the awareness of the

other groups. I'm sure that they see this show of disrespect as the very thing that makes their respective groups superior to the Black groups. These groups have historically viewed their grownups and elderly as integral to their existence, and as an under-pin to the continuation of their civilization. Even in prison these groups reflect these more endearing traits of their larger, outside culture. Suffice it to say that the Black groups suffer from a deficiency of paternal and maternal grounding, and tend to sustain themselves only by the individual characteristics of the recognized group members. This particular group dynamic is destined to collapse in on itself because it lacks the necessary nurturing and positive criticism normally provided by the elders to create the social counter-pressures needed. The group tends to simply feed on itself in a kind of runaway chain reaction in which it consumes as fuel even the members of the group, as it desperately tries to sustain itself. In this respect, the Black groups absolutely reflect the traits of their larger outside subculture in which both these jailhouse and free Black subcultures are destined to self-destruct. It's very ironic that the individual need to create a sense of security and protection around themselves gives way to an all out declaration of violence that is driven by a group think mentality, at the expense of bringing harm to its individual group members.

After all, it was the desire not to be harmed that encouraged each member to join the group. This irony epitomizes the madness and the satanic influences that give birth to such groups. It's troubling that these kids identify themselves more with hardened urban criminals and thugs than they do with the trapping of an upper-middleclass existence. They all tend to come here with an assumed identity of criminal and thug life fabricated from the negative countercultural debris of gansta rap videos, lyrics, and inner-city hood movies. I am convinced that these kids exist in a fantasy world that is speedily carrying them down into the very pit of hell! In my effort to resist the temptation of digressing into the abyss of any number of a hundred reasons for why we are failing these kids, I will attempt to stay the course of this pseudo prison journal. However, permit me to say that it has been this close confinement within the walls of this county jail with these Black groups that has given me a broader view of the troubles such a counterculture can produce, not only in the socio-economically deprived urban neighborhoods but in the affluent Black neighborhoods as well. It saddens me to see so many young, nice looking, young Black men with the appearance of being very well taken care of, come in here either feeling ashamed or guilty of their social status, preferring instead to embrace an identity that is diametrically opposite to the one available if they had chosen to utilize the resources available to them. That's the awesome power of such a demonically driven, and youth-centered Black counterculture. This is the thing that consumes my prayers, and provides my motivation to reach out to my young, Black cellmates.

The awesome task of maintaining my sanity and my spiritual environment leaves me wholly dependent upon the power I receive from God through my obedience to His will, and my desire to become one with him through Jesus Christ. Sometimes I feel as though I'm behind a fragile cement dike that's holding back the overwhelming pressures of a sea of pent up demonic expressions being suppressed in my cellmates by my constant prayers and the ministering I try to provide them whenever possible. On occasion, I can feel the immense pressures causing the spiritual wall of the dike to buckle to the strain, and I frantically run to

and fro in my haste alongside the wall applying the cement of prayer to any leaks, lest the wall give way. As of the time of this entry, I have, through God's grace, been able to maintain my spiritual environment with very few exceptions. Considering the true nature of my young cellmates, this is indeed a miracle! But by the grace of God has this been possible. I myself will be the first to admit that I had very little hope of this ever happening, but God told me to keep praying for them, and against the spirits trying to disrupt my environment and hinder my relationship with the Lord. This endeavor has required all of my spiritual strength. I also have to remain agile enough to bare my spiritual shield against the fiery darts of those that would try to put a chink in my spiritual armor by creating an atmosphere of animosity. Creating a chink in my spiritual armor would be analogous to the cement dike springing a leak, and would effectively diminish my ability to maintain my spiritual environment because I would no longer be lined up with God's will for my life, which is the true source of my power.

Staying lined up with God's will for my life in her has been my focus, and has come to symbolize the prized possession for which I am fighting for against all the wiles of the devil. It never ceases to amaze me the clever ways that Satan can manipulate people to do his will, and at how personalized and tailored his craftiness can be when it is directed at a specific person. You might refer to it as custom made warfare because of how he zeros in on a specific target and delivers just the right amount and mixture of his arson to more effectively overcome this person's defenses. I am constantly being attacked by these "smart" bombs on a daily basis, but by the grace of God, my defenses have remained intact. The desire to indulge in the trapping of Satan by nearly all of the inmates is irresistible and irrepressible. They seem fueled by it, and even crave it more than their necessary food. All things vulgar, vile, negative, disrespectful, unproductive, and self-destructive tend to top the list of forbidden fruit these guys have an insatiable appetite for. The bible describes these bad fruit as works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21) and that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, meaning that these fruit are of the devil. A lot of these guys, sadly, think they are saved and are doing nothing worthy of going to hell, but they are mistaken. How great is that darkness! Either they don't know they are advancing Satan's kingdom, or they don't care. Many of them feel that because the gansta rap subculture is being credited with generation lots of money for a very few individuals, there must be some virtue and goodness about it because after all, people are being "blessed" with this money from God. Their darkness is so great that they choose to believe it in spite of the fact that most, if not all, of these folks receiving these so-called blessings are not even saved! This nonsense is absolutely a trick of the devil, and these kids' lives are being sacrificed by the thousands into the fires of hell. Why? Is it because of the godly status we insist on raising anyone who has money, regardless of their affiliation with the Lord Jesus Christ? When did the Black community sink so low spiritually that we began to equate godliness with gain? This concept is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, so what gospel are we following?

The gospel of Jesus Christ or the gospel of fleshly man? Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal 6: 7,8). Is the plight of our lost children evident of what the Black community has been sowing, or is our hellish state merely a sign of the times? I will have

you all to ponder these questions. I recently came from the afternoon free-time into my cell and was faced with a very delicate situation. One of my young cellmates, the 26 year old who professes to be an aspiring gansta rapper, and who also says he is saved, was asked by the 18 year old cellmate to recite the rap he had just written. Now, bear in mind that just before we had gone out to free-time, the urge to sing some phases of gansta rap had taken hold of the younger guy. I brought it to his attention that he was disturbing me while I was reading my bible. I then offered a truce to the both of them that if they wouldn't rap out loud, I wouldn't read my bible out loud, pray out loud, or read my spiritual warfare prayer out loud. I further stated that we all had to live in this cell together and we couldn't just do what we wanted because if we could these are the things I would want to do.

I don't do them out of respect for everyone in the cell, and I figure that you guys could at least show me the same respect. There was complete silence. I assumed that my point had been well taken. Anyway, when the young guy asked him to recite his rap song, the older guy seemed to resist, out of respect for me, I think. Then, whether intentionally or not, the younger guy started singing the song loudly, as if to be in total defiance against me. This I had to nip in the bud immediately, so I started reading aloud my spiritual warfare prayer and then all hell started to break loose, I started to be accused of unfairly referring to their conversation and rap lyrics as satanic, and how could I, an inmate like themselves, judge them? Although the defense they both put up seemed right in their own eyes, it was the typical defense offered by most people who willfully, and willingly walk in sin, regardless if they think they're saved or not. Scripture says, "The wicked walk in darkness, they know not at what they stumble." But the fact is there is no defense against the knowledge of God. The more I tried to appeal to their sense of reason with scripture, the more defiant was their defense of their right to live as they pleased regardless of whether it was in God's will for them. They began to champion their position with such determination that it had to make even ole Satan as proud as a peacock, and cause a heartfelt tear to drop from his eyes. I was dismayed by their defense but not completely surprised by it. Their display had only been the tip of the iceberg as far as what really lurked beneath the surface of their pent up and suppressed emotions.

This outburst was only a minor breach in the dike but served as a critical alert regarding the intense pressure that each man was dealing with. Their need to express themselves freely was beginning to reach a boiling point and I was going to have to contain the situation at all cost. Fortunately, the deputy heard the loud commotion from our cell and came down and quickly diffused the situation, quite to my embarrassment because I shouldn't have let it get out of hand in the first place. I just couldn't fight the desire to defend my right to exist in this cell free of anything that hindered my relationship with the Lord. I insisted that I was not going to passively stand by and permit my environment to become captive to the kingdom of Satan through the vehicle of gansta rap culture and the associated vulgar and profane language. I threatened that I would sue all the powers at my disposal to fight against them disrespectfully trying to make me a hostage to such satanic nonsense. I was more than ready to do open spiritual warfare! However, after awhile, cooler heads prevailed and we all apologized to one another and decided that it was in the best interest of us all if we simply lived peacefully. Praise be to God, who has allowed me to enter into his rest!

That was indeed a close call, and me with a little more than a day to go before my release. I'm not saying this little eruption couldn't have been handled by me a lot better but deep down I felt totally offended by Satan's attempt to come into my cell, my house, my place of refuge to set up his kingdom and establish his rule. Not on my watch! Through my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ I have been given authority over him and his kingdom, not the other way around. I was indignant towards his move against me, but I don't think I was clear enough with my cellmates in letting them know that I did not take the matter personally, and really had nothing against them. How was I to tell them who my real enemy was without further offending them. I decided to let the matter rest, in hopes that God would touch their hearts and mind and lead them to show favor towards me. After all, how could I, in good conscience, subject myself to Satan's kingdom without putting up the fight of my life? How could I get my cellmates to understand that their Satan-serving lifestyle is supposed to be subject to me, and come under my dominion. I am not supposed to come under theirs! How do I get them to know that for the kingdom of God, I am not a coward soldier, and am willing to suffer, and if need be, die for Christ? I am compelled to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ against all enemies including foreign, domestic, and spiritual, especially in my dwelling place. For once, I had taken the risk of defending the gospel in total disregard for my own safety, and even felt compelled to do it. This is exactly the behavior I am supposed to take out of here and nourish and sustain for the rest of my life. Satan is never again have dominion over me if I can remain lined up with God's will for my life because, for once, I realize the power available to me by totally surrendering my life to God.

When I am weak, He is strong. Although the occupants of this cell have verbally made a pact to pursue peace, I find it both amazing and disturbing that they seem to think that they have come out with the short end of the stick, and that the terms aren't exactly fair to them. They seem to think that they should not be bound by the restrictions imposed and should be free to express themselves in whatever manner they choose, yet they don't think that I should be extended this same freedom. This sounds strangely familiar, and reeks of the irrational thinking associated with it. My case in point is it's the same type of rights demanded by unbelievers in this country, at the expense of the same right of expression being suppressed regarding Christians. "Amazing, I thought, that a microcosm of the larger society could manage to exist with such parallels in a county jail. As far as the situation in here, it could all be resolved, at least for my cellmates, if they extended me the same privileges they seek. The problem is that they don't want to hear what I have to say, but think me unfair when I don't want to hear what they have to say. Somebody please tell me where the logic is here? They actually expect me to listen to that filth without objection when they know I'm trying hard to get close to Christ, and they both consider themselves to be saved, and one of them, the 18 year old, I prayed the sinner's prayer with and led him to Christ! Well, I don't know where his heart was but he did repeat the words.

I have just come in from prayer call that was held out in the yard, in which I was given an opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. I've given many testimonies in public before but this was the first time I had put together a sermon and preached it openly to others. Who knows, this could be the start of a new beginning. I know it will be as far as me walking out of here in absolute authority and dominion over my old nature. I am referring to that person who was formally known as Doug. The sermon that God put on my mind to talk

about had to do with my aforementioned declaration that I have come here to commit a murder. That was my opening statement and I can still see the eyes and facial expressions of the men as they struggled to understand the meaning behind my words. I started to become very serious and stared each of them straight in their eyes, as if to say that I had not decided on who it would be. I began telling them about my relationship with this person whom I had started to get to know, and how I gradually began to allow to run my life. I talked about the good times we had had, and how much I had entrusted this person with everything I had to offer him.

However, I pleaded with the crowd of on looking men, I found that this person was not my friend, and was not interested in my wellbeing. As a direct result of his influence I had fallen from social and professional grace, and had allowed him to destroy much of my life. Finally, I had had a moment of clarity and decided to be rid of him completely. I planned to lure him into this facility where I would fast and pray him out of my life, effectively nailing him to the same cross of condemnation that Jesus Christ was hung on. I raised my voice and turned in the direction of my cell window and pointed upward to it saying, "There, up in that cell is where I committed this ghastly murder under the light of darkness. As a lasting memorial, I nailed him to a cross in effigy by drawing a figure of him underneath my bed. He will hang there until the jail cell is repainted or someone erases it, but he will hang on that sacred cross for all eternity." I was started to become comfortable, and the words were coming easier to my mind as I ranted and raved about how each of us has that kind of friend in our lives that we need to get rid of, that we need to murder once and for all by allowing Jesus Christ to take control of our lives. I continued watching them as they looked at me unblinkingly, as though they were surprised that I was saying this, and equally amazed that it was coming from me. After all, I had been so quiet and such a private person, that none of them really knew what to expect from me. Now, they were witnessing me display a side of my character that none of them probably expected. However, it had the desired affect, and many of them thanked me for such a personally moving, and thought-provoking message. I stood relieved that it was over, and felt very victorious over my natural man, as though that single event was what was needed in order to make good on my plan. Now that Doug was dead, Douglas could come to life.

Doug had been the person more closely related to my old nature, and whose identity I have found a need to detach myself from. I need a new beginning, and I need to have something in my life that symbolizes this newness. I need it to say something about me personally, to identify me in a new light. Something about me that had been suppressed or rejected because it simple didn't fit with what the image my old nature was trying to project. Something that had belonged to me but had been discarded and set aside for something more suitable to my old nature. Something that had been denied a life but is worthy of stepping up into the forefront of a new existence, stepping up from the lifeless tomb of the forgotten, the lifeless tomb of things thrown away. I need something I can bring forth into a new light and a new life. I need my name back. Douglas ... come forth! Yes, Douglas, my full first birth name. The name I had despised for most of my life, and had banished it to the tomb of hated first names. The very pronunciation of the name sounded soft and unmanly to me but had quite the opposite effect on most of the women in my life who would take great delight in slowly enunciating the name during intimate moments. Under these

circumstances, I would agree that the name even gained favor with me. However, when it came to my male friends and acquaintances, the shortened, diminutive version of my name was absolutely a must.

The name Doug seemed much more manly and chauvinistic so, because of my misogynous character, I decided to adopt the name. I thought it to be a strong name; a name that attracted and demanded respect, and attracted attention. Even the pronunciation was hard-hitting and immediate ... "Doug", and left behind no anticlimactic vowel sounds that seemed to be apologizing for being included with the spelling. Yes, the name Doug was, I thought, was the ideal name I would use as my first name whenever possible, regardless of the opportunity for confusion. This name would come to symbolize, and be associated with my old nature in every way. It, in effect, would come to be the identity of my nemesis instead of my alter-ego. I suspect that it will be a lot harder being Douglas than Doug but I invite the challenge. As the expression goes, "Come what may." I need Douglas to be all he can be in the Lord. I need Douglas to be fully alive in Christ because in Christ we move, and breath, and have our being, which is the glory of God.

You might say that for a long time I have been wrestling with God by my continued involvement with substance abuse and my ceaseless prayers to be delivered from it. Sometimes I think that the substance abuse has been the affliction I have received as a result of contending with God through my walk along the path of becoming like Christ. As horrible and painful as it has been dealing with substance abuse, I have, through the grace of God, been blessed to continue to become like Jesus in spite of it all. God's mercies have been for me the main ingredient required for me to maintain the constituency of my faith. For, the more the evils which the body endures, the greater is the hope which the inward man entertains, and the more bright and resplendent does it become, as gold which is examined or tested by much fire.

Consider the following passage:

"When the spirit helpeth our infirmities, and our earnest and vast desires can scarcely find words to utter them, and we still mean more than we can express, then prayer is indeed wrestling with God. However tried or discouraged, we shall prevail; and prevailing with Him in prayer, we shall prevail against all enemies that strive with us."—Matthew Henry Concise

*"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10 (KJV)*

I too, like Job, feel that my afflictions are not lost on God, and that he knows my heart and mind well enough to know that I see no wrong in the man Jesus Christ, or God's admonition for me to become like him. I am of the mind that whatever God has to use, or do, to make me more like Christ, he has my express permission to do so, even if it does defy my puny understanding of how best to go about it. It is my hope that through it all I will continue to prove a very useful tool or vessel for advancing the Kingdom of God. It is my reasonable service.

I don't know how to explain it but I know that it has been the drugs, and the devastating effect they have had on my life that God has used as the fiery furnace in which to try my heart, and make me more like Christ. It's because of this windfall that I can hardly resent such a fall from grace because the chances of me coming to live my life for Christ would have been very remote, if not impossible. Even if I had, I would have never had the spiritual capacity that I now have. To say the least, I would have only been another baby Christian out there "playing" church, and asking God to bless me with material stuff in spite of my blatant disobedience to him. Yeah, I know you might say "but nothing is impossible for God", and you would be right but I think that the very fact that God is having to take this approach with me means that there were no other reasonable options. With me, God had to play his trump card of being the master of the universe and allow just the right environment to exist for him to get my attention, and keep it.

Scripture says, "*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God—those whom he has called according to his plan. Romans 8:28 (GW).*"

"As Paul had a thorn in the flesh given to humble him, lest he should be too elevated by the abundant revelations granted him [[2Co 12:7](#)], so Jacob's lameness was to keep him mindful of this mysterious scene, and that it was in gracious condescension the victory was yielded to him. In the greatest of these spiritual victories which, through faith, any of God's people obtain, there is always something to humble them."—Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

"But though the obtaining of mercy, the first-fruits of the Spirit of grace, pledges a God, who will certainly finish the work which he has began; yet the afflicted believer is not to conclude that all prayer and entreaty will be in vain, and that he should sink into despair, and faint when he is reprov'd of Him. He cannot tell [if] the intention of God in afflicting him may be to produce penitence and prayer in his heart. May we learn to obey and trust the Lord, even in tribulation; to live or die as he pleases: we know not for what good ends our lives may be shortened or prolonged." —Matthew Henry Concise

Now that I have sufficiently crucified my old man, I want my real birth name back, so again I say, "Douglas ... come forth!"