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→ **MINISTRY UPDATE** ←

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UPDATE

God is so merciful and kind, and His grace is beyond our earthly understanding. I have a hard time understanding that, especially when it concerns my enemies. I think He should send fire down out of heaven and give them what they deserve. But that's not His plan.

I was recently reminded of this when I stopped by Tinker AFB to get my entry badge. After a short while, they pulled me aside and said they couldn't issue it because in 2008 I had a charge of failure to register as a sex offender. Really!?! My enemies had somehow managed to manipulate the system to cause defamation of my character.

At that time, they were trying to shut down our ministry. They arrested me for housing two sex offenders together even though we had an exception. But they didn't want to take it to court. So, it stretched on a while. Then the lawyer convinced me that if I would sign a no contest paper and not get in trouble for 30 days, it would all be wiped clean and that would be the end of it. All seemed well, and we continued housing them together for three more years.

Then three years later they passed a law that said we couldn't use our exemption to house them together in

mobile homes and travel trailers. We had to put 110 men out on the street in one day. They had finally found a way to bankrupt us or, so it seemed. One person in a mobile home would not pay the bills and keep the ministry open. But God helped me borrow \$2.5 million to add enough beds to pay the bills. That brings us to today.

Everything the devil has tried to do has forced us to grow faster. I would rather not have debt, but it is better than having to close the ministry. We now house 250 clients and will soon reach 260 plus. That includes some married couples and some single women. Two months ago, they tried to make the married couples park unusable for us, but a visit from our lawyers brought them to their senses, at least for now. The Enemy controls our nation.

Anyone who trusts the system anymore is very naïve and is welcoming disaster. Our nation is no longer God-fearing, and our judges have twisted the law to match their own agenda. So, it's not about right and wrong anymore but about political correctness. Therefore, there are no certainties, but all about money and power.

Think about this. We have gone from a country of laws and freedoms to a country of anarchy. The laws and rules are different from one state to another, one city to another, and from one county to another. It's become so obvious that I don't even need to give examples, even though I could.

We are becoming more and more ruled by mob rule. And you are even allowed to buy and pay for the mob. Law has now become whatever you can enforce. This leads to??? Who knows yet? However, I have recently read reports that predict possible civil war.

Right now, we are at civil unrest. I said those same things more than a year ago.

Let me say this, our nation started its decline with the sexual revolution and the killing of babies. Then the mentally ill was put on the street and the majority ended up in prison. Then, sex offenders, who had paid for their crimes (many very minor indeed), became the hated and easiest target. Who will be the next target? Lethal, or just hated? Many will say "No way!" but human nature without Christ doesn't change. Many thought the same thing about the Jews. Look what happened. Some still refuse to believe it to this day.

From the targets I have read about, and there are many, it's anyone's guess who will be first. Here's a list:

- Sex offenders
- Christians
- Other criminals
- Old people in need of medical care
- Handicapped people
- People who don't believe
- Etc.

Who will be first? Who knows. Satan just wants blood any way he can get it. He would be happier if it were Christians first, of course. And, in the end, whoever does not accept the mark, name, or number of the beast will perish. There's always been hate. What will be the trigger? Probably money.

I must say, people like me may be first on the list. The enemy will not tolerate any more than he must. Since I refuse to keep quiet, it may not go well. It has already gotten to the place for the furtherance of the ministry, I don't reveal plans. So just know I'm in it for life, and I fear more what God can do to the soul than what man can do to the body. So, for the better or the worse, I'm all in.

Thanks to all the incredible individuals who stepped up to help when most of the churches quit due to political influence. You really came through. We will always be grateful, and you will be blessed. I am working on something and will send you a gift as soon as it is finished.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS!!!

— David Nichols

TESTIMONIES



I don't remember much of my childhood prior to the age of eight. I was raised on a farm, and I learned to drive a tractor and a combine when I was eight. When I was nine, I was working in the fields by myself. We milked 40 head of cows every day. At an early age, my brothers

and I learned how to take care of the fields and the animals. We also cooked and cleaned house. I developed a good work ethic when I was only a young child.

Life at home was not always good. There were times when it was tough to have enough food for seven people, but we survived. My dad became an alcoholic by the time I was 15. When he was sober, my brothers and I received the bitter end of things.

I received Jesus into my life in 1973, but I didn't change much for over a year. My parents split up in the summer of 1973, and I got married in December of the same year. I was attending OSU Tech at the time. My wife and I moved to Enid, Oklahoma in 1975, and we both got jobs. My wife gave birth to our daughter in 1976. We went to church, but I lived one way during the week and another on Sunday morning. We divorced in 1979, and that was when I rededicated my life to God and changed my behavior.

I married my second wife in 1983 and moved back to the farm. I was still going to church and I was starting to see changes in my life. I went back to school in 1996 so I could train to be an EMT. I worked as an EMT for 15 years. I was arrested in 2011 and spent six years in prison. I read the entire Bible several times while incarcerated. I was released June 2016 and came to Hand Up. For several months, I tried to get a job, but I was turned down because I had rheumatoid arthritis in my hands, Hand Up work with me while I filed for Social Security Disability. I now work for the ministry.

It isn't hard to follow the rules at Hand Up. If a person puts in effort, Hand Up can help a person find a job and be successful.

— *Kenneth Haws*



I was born in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, but we moved to Seattle when I was six months old. I lived in Seattle for 22 years. I was raised in a Catholic home, but we never went to church. There was always a Bible collecting dust on my parent's

liquor cabinet. There was never any talk about God in my house when I was growing up. We always said our bedtime prayers, and we always prayed over our meals.

My parents were alcoholics their entire lives. Dad always had a can of beer and a shot of whiskey on his night stand. When he woke up, he would drink that shot of whiskey. Afterward, he would make a pot of coffee and leave for work. I thought this was just the way life was.

I took my first drink of beer when I was 12, and I was introduced to weed not long after that. I soon became addicted to both weed and alcohol. When I was 13, I started sleeping with my mom's friend's daughters.

I became addicted to sex at 15-years-old. I was addicted to cocaine around the same time. My dad took the family back to

Minnesota when I was 16, but he left me in Seattle. He gave me an old Ford station wagon. The old car became my home. I was 16-years-old and homeless.

I started working for a waterbed factory. I assembled waterbeds. My boss was a cocaine dealer, so I started partying with him. It wasn't long before I was giving my paycheck back to him to support my cocaine habit. I was meeting a lot of women, and I fell in love with the lifestyle of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. It was the 1980s and I truly believed that this was the way life was supposed to be. I quit that job in 1987 and moved to Minnesota to be with my family.

I continued to party after moving home to Minnesota. In 1989, I went to work for a construction company in Fargo, North Dakota. I continued partying. The company moved to Ada, Oklahoma later the same year, and I moved with it. I met my first wife in Ada. She didn't drink or use drugs. We had three beautiful children together, but she eventually grew tired of my drinking and drug use. She divorced me in 1994, and my whole world crashed around me.

I moved to a hotel in Springdale, Arkansas. I got a DUI in the company vehicle and lost my job. At the hotel, I met a maid who introduced me to crystal meth and the needle. I soon became addicted to this new drug. The maid and I were soon married, and we had a son together. I was stealing to support my meth addiction and went to prison. My wife and son moved to Elk City, Oklahoma while I was in prison. After being released on parole, I moved there to be with my family. Within a month, I was back to shooting meth and drinking alcohol.

My wife and I separated in 2003, and three years later I was arrested for having sex with a minor. While I was in the county jail, my cellmate Victor asked me if I knew the Lord. This took me by surprise because I was all about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. He prayed with me that day and I accepted the Lord into my life. That day changed my life forever. In 2006, I was sentenced to 15 years in prison and 15 years of probation.

I continued to read my Bible and pray every day. I had plans to go to Elk City and live with friend after I was released, but he

lived too close to a school. I prayed for a home and one day heard another inmate talking about Hand Up Ministries. I asked him about it, and he told me Hand Up was a faith-based program. I sent in an application and David Nichols accepted me. I am living proof of the fact that prayer works. I am free from drugs and alcohol, And, by God's grace, I have been able to make amends with the people I hurt (wives, family, friends, and children). Thank the Lord for David Nichols, Hand Up, and our staff.

— Steven Buretta



Hello to my Christian brothers and sisters. My name is Mark, and I am the newsletter editor for Hand Up Ministries. I am happy to serve the ministry using the skills and talents God gave me.

I was born a simple country boy in backwoods Alabama, and I do mean backwoods, as my accent often proves. We had well water and a large garden, but no animals or anything like that. I was raised by my grandmother, grandfather, and mother. Mother was often sick with her depression and mental illness, but she tried. My family was devout Southern Baptist. We went to church every time the doors opened, plus Sunday. There was no cussing, drinking, or vulgar language. It was a clean, decent Christian home.

I accepted the Lord into my heart at 10 -years-old. It was during one of the summer church camps I attended. The feeling of warmth and kindness that filled my heart was incredible. I never wanted to lose this feeling. But, as most of you already know, this is easier said than done.

Skip ahead a few years, and my mother and I moved out on our own. Because of her mental illness, Child Protective Services removed me from the home and placed me in emergency shelters.

I bounced from shelter to shelter for a few years before being placed in foster care. It was there I started my downward spiral.

One foster child introduced me to Paganism. I studied and soon considered myself a true master of the arts. But the truth was Satan was manipulating me into believing I was capable of these feats. It was sad really. After my Church of Christ foster family found this out, and a few more things I don't care to discuss, they accused me of molesting their grandchild to get me out of the home.

I spent two years in jail waiting for the chance to prove my innocence. But my lawyer convinced me to take a plea agreement. He told me I would risk a life sentence if I didn't plead guilty. Since I was only 16 at the time, I took the agreement. I ended up spending ten years in prison for a crime I didn't commit. But it was necessary. I learned to follow Christ again, even though I stumbled several times along the way.

After being released from prison, my life has prospered. I earned my AA and BA in Mass Communications, worked for several local and national publications, and even won national awards for my work. A few years' back, *The Journal Record* awarded me the Oklahoman Achievers Under 40 Award.

I'm not writing about my accomplishments to brag. I want each of you to know anything is possible. I achieved each of these after prison and while on the registry. If you work hard and trust the Lord, you can do anything. Don't let anyone tell you it is impossible or that you can't do it because you're a sex offender. This is another one of the Devil's lies. Don't let Satan rob you of God's gifts!

— Mark Smith

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