

MY TESTIMONY

Robert, Sarasota County Jail

My name is Robert, and I have been saved through the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God. Nobody is perfect, and I'm definitely not perfect. It took me to come to jail to finally see what life's all about. I thought I could control everything. I was doing drugs and hurting the people that meant the most to me. I have always believed that there was a God, but I never took it to heart. I was seeing what kind of programs I could take while I was here in Jail, and I signed up for the Dad's Program [Parenting 101 unit]. I was skeptical about it, but when I met Don [Batterman] and when we went over the first chapter of the program, we started to go over "forgiveness". I had a problem with that. **I THOUGHT THAT ALL THE BAD THINGS THAT I HAD DONE COULDN'T BE FORGIVEN**, but Don showed me that I can be forgiven. I realized that I was so lost in my own world and saw that I was very unhappy with my life. How can I be happy with everyone that cares for me if I'm not happy with myself... I had to lose everything and everyone that cared for me the most to finally see the picture, and I can tell you that I now see the picture! You know when I first came to jail all I wanted to do was get out. I still thought that I could control my situation. I needed to figure out what to do-but then something hit me. I had this weight on my shoulder that was just pressing harder and harder the more I fought. Then it hit me. **I WAS AT ROCK BOTTOM**. I truly needed God in my life.

I sat down one night and prayed and prayed and asked God to forgive me and for Him to come into my life. I can say that, **NOW MORE THAN EVER, I AM FINALLY CONTENT** and happy with myself. The weight has been lifted. I know that this is just a chapter in my life, and I know there will be bumps in the road, but now I have faith and the strength to overcome any obstacle in my life. I give thanks to Don, and the love that he has for helping others. He helped guide me in the right direction to the Lord. THANK YOU.

A Word from President Don Pratt about "JAILHOUSE RELIGION".

Fun is often poked at convicts who use "religion" as a way to con their way into getting back to their own old ways. Their religious experience is dismissed as empty because just as soon as they get out of jail or prison, they reoffend and end up right back there. They did not learn a thing other than of how to become a better criminal.



There are certainly those that do that, but our focus is on another large group that is sincere.

They are the ones who "hit bottom" where jail gives them time to think minus the drugs, alcohol, pimps, dealers, and associates that entrap them in that lifestyle. It is a natural setting in which to share the Gospel and help them adopt a new life.

It all begins in the mind. Until there are changes there, there will not be any changes in lifestyle after release. "Hitting bottom" turns people toward God. It gives us the opportunity to lead them to Christ. Leading them to Christ is not enough, though. They are born as spiritual babies and have to be taught and nurtured. That is where FIT comes in. These spiritual babies do not yet have the background to understand how to properly live the Christian life. That is why we have the eight life-skills units of the FIT program. In our popular dating and marriage unit, for example, they learn what a Christian relationship should look like. Many of them do not know because no one has ever taught them. They might as well be orphans because they lack family or positive family role models. We may not solve all their problems, but we do see a new way of thinking and attitude right away.

Do all our “graduates” stay out jail? No. The problems encountered upon release sometimes overwhelm them. Some of these include transitional problems like:

- Going from being totally controlled in incarceration to totally unguided, unstructured life outside
- Being in jail for debts like restitution and child support and then being let out with no resources
- Having no place to go
- Having lost custody of children and jobs
- Being poor and not able to pay debts when they get out
- Having transportation problems that lead to missed parole obligations that lead to re-arrest on technical grounds.
- Additional fines and contempt of court for unpaid traffic violations. A minor charge turns into a felony.

How many of us would do very well under such circumstances?

This is a real opportunity for effective ministry, but there are few volunteers and many excuses. Two misconceptions are: “it takes a special person for that kind of ministry” and “you have to have a criminal history in order to be effective”. Neither of these is true. I knew nothing about this type of ministry for most of my life, have never had a personal record, and was even biased against people who did not have a church background for a good part of my life. Many of the excuses that people give for not getting involved really boil down to not wanting to associate with the poor and orphaned and not having the time demanded to really make a difference.

FIT has thought about this and has tried to make it as easy as possible for a fulfilling and effective personal ministry. It offers the following provisions for maximum impact:

- FIT one-day training to get you orientated
- Structured, focused program that covers a wide variety faith-based life-skills
- Separate facilitator and student workbooks for all eight units
- Network of 400 trained facilitators. You are not working alone.
- Free certificate program for FIT-trained facilitators
- Measured time commitments-units have 5, 7, 9, 12, or 13 lessons

If you would like to know how you can make your own ministry more effective or if you would like to have a training session in your area, contact me at (941) 739-1338 and we will assist you. If you cannot help as a volunteer but could support a student to receive all the workbooks needed for the entire program for \$60, please consider making a donation online at www.100hour.org.

We are often short on volunteers, money, and facilities that will let us in, but we are never short on love.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:36-38, NIV)
