

#8 Second Chance

Ten years ago in the summer of 2009 my life took a dramatic and radical turn. I was a lawyer in private practice in a long term relationship, a father, a grandfather. I went to church every week. To all outward appearances to anyone who knew me, life was good. What no one knew except me and God was that I had made a series of very poor choices that now had me spiraling into a very dark and depressed. I had long since removed God from my life essentially telling him he could not help me. I had made a mess of things and believed that I only could clean it up. Despite my best efforts I could not fix what I had done. I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure, hopeless, a lack of self-worth and that ultimately allowed me to think unthinkable and unimaginable things and that everyone would be better off without me in it. I tried but God had other plans. The doctor said I would not make it and that my loved ones should prepare themselves. As they gathered in prayer around my hospital bed while I was unconscious, totally unaware of the wait was going well, I slowly improved. The treatment was finally working. It was having a positive effect. The physical healing continued, then came the emotional and psychological recovery and they all came together. But the biggest and deepest void in my life was spiritual. I had been doing my life on my own, by myself the solitary me and myself and I for so long, and yet I was surrounded by people in my life who really loved me and cared for me but I never let them in. God had been in my life as a young man but somewhere and sometime along the way I let him slip away and I did not try to hold on. God knew what a failure I was. The only reason others did not know was because I did everything I could so folks would see me as a success. When I crashed everything about me was laid bare for all to see. There were no more secrets as my son would tell me in the hospital, "Dad no more secrets." What matters is what you do this day forward. The advice I heard every day was to take one day at a time, one hour at a time if I had to. What I knew from the moment I woke up from being unconscious perhaps in a coma I really never knew all the medical things that had happened. But when I woke up I knew that I could not do life alone any more. I thank God that I was alive and that I would see the woman I loved, my son and his wife, my grandchildren, my brothers and sisters, loved ones and friends one more time. And then I would have to deal with the consequences of my poor choices. I prayed every day and one day in particular I prayed a very

specific and personal prayer with tears streaming down my face, I told God that I can't do this anymore. I can't do life any more by myself and that I needed his help. The following moment I heard in my heart and in my mind, from a very calm presence with a source of strength, love and compassion I heard, "I'm here. I'm still here. I never left. You left me. Now take my hand and let's do this together." From that moment to this moment I have never felt alone again. For years the loneliness I felt was deafening at times, the emptiness was tangible. Now what I felt was a sense of peace and I knew I was not alone. Over the months that followed and the years some of my loved ones and friends drifted away while new ones came into my life. God and I continued to have conversations daily sometimes me telling Him that I needed more help and that He needed to do a better job. It may sound funny to you or to some, but God and I have always had a reverently irreverent relationship. I always loved Him dearly even though I pushed Him away. But I always felt that He was someone that I could relate to. In fact I supposed that He was the only god I could understand and knew and one I could relate to and be honest with, speak to Him like I spoke to my best friends. So we would continue to have conversations daily and so He would tell me things and direct me in ways and give me the sense of companionship to know that I wasn't alone in doing life. The more I looked to Him the more we talked the closer we got. At times I felt like He was not timely in his help but I always knew that it was on time and frequently found myself laughing because it always seemed that his way was the better way even though at times I continue to think I have the better options.

So for the next year I had a lot to deal with relating to those bad choices I had made. While I had hoped to avoid prison I knew that it was probable and in fact on November 5, 2010, I had a 5:00 a.m. knock on my apartment door. That woke me up immediately. And I knew right away who it was and what it was about. I was arrested and after pleading guilty I spent the next 3 years in prison and then another 4 years on parole. While some disagree with this, going to prison saved my life. I took God with me when I went and together we worked on making me the person he wanted me to be. When I left I walked out with God and once again together with several persons he placed in my path, I started over. It was as if I had a second chance at life. And so the years went by. I was able to do work that was fulfilling, it was important and that was able to give me a life

but over the years I soon discovered that it wasn't giving me life. And so that led to an opportunity to where I could serve God in the ministry here at Mercy Street. An opportunity that once again I brought him with me and He continues with me to this day. And so I suppose the message of my life to this point is one of redemption and one of resurrection, one of mercy, one of compassion, one of love. I am grateful for this life that I have and this second chance and I really enjoy the opportunity to be able to share my story with people, to let them know that the same God that loves me and has been with me is the same God that will be with them and will give them life. One thing I came away with during this experience is how much life matters, how much every life matters, how much my life matters and I want folks to know that their lives matter, that God has a special place for them that God has a life for them that God will be with them and that God has his people here today right now that will walk alongside them when they need him to share the joy of life, to share the sorrows of life, to give meaning to their lives and to help them along the way. In the same way God helped me in the same way his people helped me and in the same way MS has helped me to know that I don't have to do this alone. That I live in a community where God is present and God's love is present every day.